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The Black Cat

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February 1919

Clever Short Stories

The Black Cat

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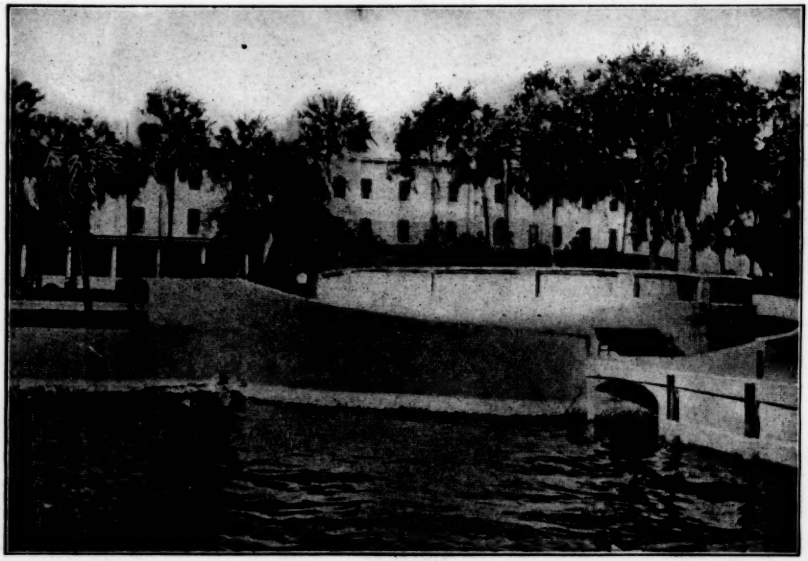

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THE UNBIDDEN GUEST

By CARL CLAUSEN

In the dance halls of Port Kennedy, Ahmun the shell-diver gets a frosty reception; but in the shanty on the cliffs outside the town he finds more than a lodging for the night.

UCH has been said about the lack of virture of Port Said, Antwerp, Butte, Montana and Tia Juana, Mexico. Historians and travelers alike have related with bated breath and dripping pens the lack of decorum of these communities, but not one of them has dropped a tear for Port Kennedy, Thursday Island.

The fifteen hundred floating population of Thursday Island, (we say floating, advisedly, for ninety per cent of the inhabitants spend fifty per cent of their lives tramping up and down the Great Barrier Reef in pearling luggers) are blissfully ignorant of their particularly exalted state of vice. After all, vice or virtue are such only by comparison with the righteousness or corruption of surrounding conditions, and Thursday Island has no immaculate proximities to compare notes with. Were she situated near Boston or Los Angeles—oh, well!

At sundown, Aileta sat crosslegged in the doorway of her newly constructed shanty and stared expectantly across the turbulent tide rip of Torres Straits. A remarkable structure was this shanty of Aileta's. The scarcity of building materials on Thursday Island had for many weary months been the one obstacle that had delayed her marriage at the scandalous age of sixteen years.

Ahmun, the young shell-diver, had just passed through the painful and unremunerative stages of "Munjung" to that of a full-fledged diver. This was his first season to share in the proceeds of the fleet. Marriage was for him, therefore, a faraway though much-desired consummation.

Not so to the impatient Aileta. With a woman's ingenuity in matters matrimonial, she had seen a way. A week ago she had purchased from Peed, the storekeeper, two dray loads of empty kerosene cans. Filling the cans with sand, she placed them, one on top of the other, in a square to the height of six feet and plastered the cracks between the cans with seaweed and clay. The sand-weighted cans made admirable heat and storm-defying walls. For the roof she had begged a couple of motheaten bullock hides and a few sheets of rusty, corrugated iron from the Resident. A cabin door, drifted ashore from a wrecked schooner, served as a table, and with half a dozen conch shells for dishes, an ancient frying pan, a tin "billy," an old, brass-bound trunk, contents unknown, except to herself, Aileta moved in.

She had selected this site on the low cliffs overhanging the western sea, that she might watch the sails of the returning fleet rise over the rim of the gulf. Young Ahmun with the turban and breechcloth of his ancestors would see it from the deck of his lugger and wonder and rejoice.

From her doorway Aileta watched the slacking tide churn the gulf waters to foam over the reefs. At the edge of the world, the day flung its last crimson garment into the stygian pool and night brooded over the sea and the slack tide moaned ominously among the reefs. On the silent sea and the empty earth nothing stirred.

Aileta arose. This, the fourth day of her vigil, was at an end. To-morrow, surely, he would come. Dawn would bring the golden-winged fleet to anchor in the lagoon. The season was nearing its close. It was late in February. Soon, the dreaded "Willy-Willys" would come tearing down the Straits from the Northern Sea with

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Taking a pail from the table, she sought out the she-goat tethered behind the shanty. She filled the pail while the goat bleated, forlornly, in the gloom of the tropic night. Returning within, she ate her simple meal of hard-tack and goat's milk by the light of the spluttering candle. Then, she stretched herself upon the couch of dried seaweed and slept.

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An hour later, with sails furled and decks washed down, six hundred white, yellow, brown and black devils swarmed up the street, clamoring at the barred doors of the dance halls. And Port Kennedy, mother of the wolf-breed, turned up the lights, opened her tentacles and drew her sons to her groggy bosom. In fifteen minutes, the street was a blaze of lights. The dancing girls swung in step to the plaintive singing of reed and guitar. Wine flamed in cups, hot desire in eyes that had beheld, in the Deep, monsters less formidable than the unholy visions of passion, grape or poppy.

The terpsichorean palace of Tsi-Hung was filled to the corrugated iron roof with the noise and clamor of the revelers. Tsi-Hung, with an avaricious smirk under his leaky, straggling whisker and his pigtail curled discreetly under an enormous gray Stetson, dangled his fat legs over the edge of the platform where a dozen half-nude girls were clamoring to be heard, seen and admired.

Pigtailed waiters flitted in and out among the tables, balancing wine-dripping trays over the heads of the crowd, and gathering for him a harvest of the coins of many realms—Mexican and American dollars, English half sovereigns, exquisitely milled ten-franc pieces, spread-eagle reichthalers of the Vaterland, Russian rubles and strings of perforated disks from the Celestial King—er—Republic. In Port Kennedy anything goes. You can get exquisitely drunk on the coinage of any and your own particular country. This has its advantages. Your spirit of patriotism mixed with a cocktail of the other kind, and you have as it were, double value for your money.

At a lone table in the far end of the room sat a turbaned youth. There were three more chairs at the table, but they were unoccupied. Before him stood a bottle of wine, beside it a half-filled glass. An observing eye would have discerned that the wine in the glass corresponded exactly to the amount which was lacking in the bottle. He was not drinking; with his head in his hands he sat staring into the smoky atmosphere of the room.

Tsi-Hung, from his seat of vantage on the platform, espied him. Three chairs vacant at one table and the lone occupant not drinking! Bad business! Tsi-Hung slid off the platform and waddled through the crowd.

"Wha's maller, Ahmun?" he inquired with a discouraging smile. "Seeg? Beller go outslide, eh? Flesh air."

He indicated the door with a soapy eye. The youth seemed not to hear. He stared past Tsi-Hung into vacancy. His dark eyes were as expressionless as the black mouth of a cavern at midnight. Someone at the next table tapped Tsi-Hung on the shoulder.

"Shypo" Charlie, the Stormbird's skipper, leaned back in his chair and crooked a confidential finger at the Chinaman.

"Better leave the kid alone, Chinky," he admonished in a whisper, "he's got it!"

Tsi-Hung backed away from Ahmun, his eyes bulging and his greasy perspiring face blanched with terror. Placing a fat, trembling hand upon the back of Shypo's chair, he whimpered with fright.

"What for you bling 'im my place? Lep'sy! Lep'sy!" The frightened Chinaman gave Ahmun a look of horror and retreated, wobbly kneed, through the crowd, the loathsome word emanating from his lips with the hiss of an angry, cornered cobra.

Shypo leaned across the table to his companions with a loud guffaw. "Wish I'd let the bloody Chink bounce the kid and told him afterwards. T'would have done me good to watch him die of fright, the bleedin' coolie!" He glanced over his shoulder at the youth. "Poor young 'un," he added, sentimentally, "an' 'im with a girl what's straight, expectin' to get married." The thought of Aileta's virtue and her impending disappointment was too much for the tender-hearted Shypo. He tossed off his wine with a husky gulp, refilled the glass from the half-empty bottle and hollered for another quart

It was at this point that a lull in the revelry occured. A hush seemed to fall upon the crowded hall. Half-drunken men paused in the act of drinking and gazed sheepishly at each other across the litter of glasses and slender-necked bottles. The dancing girls drew their wraps about their gleaming thighs and bosoms in tentative modesty. The reeds and guitars dropped into furtive tremolo and stopped. Nimble-footed waiters hung over the guests, fingering their coin-filled pockets, beseechingly. All eyes were turned upon the open doorway where a slender brown figure stood outlined against the night.

Awakened from her sleep by the saturnalia, Aileta had hurried down the street, wondering why Ahmun had not sought her out. She was met by curious glances and whisperings, for the news of her stricken lover had spread like wild fire up and down the street. At the last place, Vigo, the Russian mate of the Albatross had directed her to Tsi-Hung's.

A wistful, shrinking figure, half child, half woman, she advanced timidly a step or two beyond the threshold, her child-eyes searching the crowd for her lover; and beneath her clear, child-like gaze, men turned their faces in shame to the sodden images of their lost selves, and women counted the swift hours to the gray dawn, and shuddered. The lotus of passion paled, momentarily, the wine flamed less crimson in the Mephitic gloom of this bagnio, where only dream-seraphs of the trailing poppy-smoke dared intrude.

With her hand clutched at her bosom, Aileta searched the ghoulish faces in the churning miasma of betel, bhang and stale beer; and her eyes fell, abashed, for Modesty and Virtue must ever droop in shame before Moloch's brazen flaunt. Fearfully, and with the shy, hesitant dignity of youth, she moved from table to table, scanning each face in the half-gloom.

And then she found him and pounced upon him with a glad cry. Ahmun raised his head from the table and stared at her in hungry agony. Shypo Charlie started from his chair with a warning cry as she was about to flee to her lover's arms, but Ahmun sprang to his feet and placed the table between himself and the girl.

"Don't touch me!" he panted, backing against the wall.

She looked at him, bewildered, yes, scornfully.

"Wouldst thou tarry with the wine on this our wedding night, O Ahmun?" she said in sorrow. "See, I have builded a home for you on the cliffs and the choicest goat of my mother's herd is tethered by the door. Come!" She held out her hand to him across the wine-dripping table.

"Don't touch me!" he repeated, his eyes bulging from their sockets in terror. "On thy peril—!" He tore the shirt sleeve from his wrist and bared his throat. "Look!" he pointed. "Here—and—here! See! The spotted death, O Aileta!"

Attracted by the scene, the revelers deserted their tables and crowded around the boy and the girl—at a respectful distance. Curious, incredulous faces leered drunkenly over each others' shoulders.

"Throw him out, the blasted leper," a voice yelled.

"Throw him out yourself," someone retorted, pointedly, at which the voice subsided. The girl turned upon them, eyes blazing.

"Cowards! Swine!" she cried. She leaned across the table to Ahmun. "Go at

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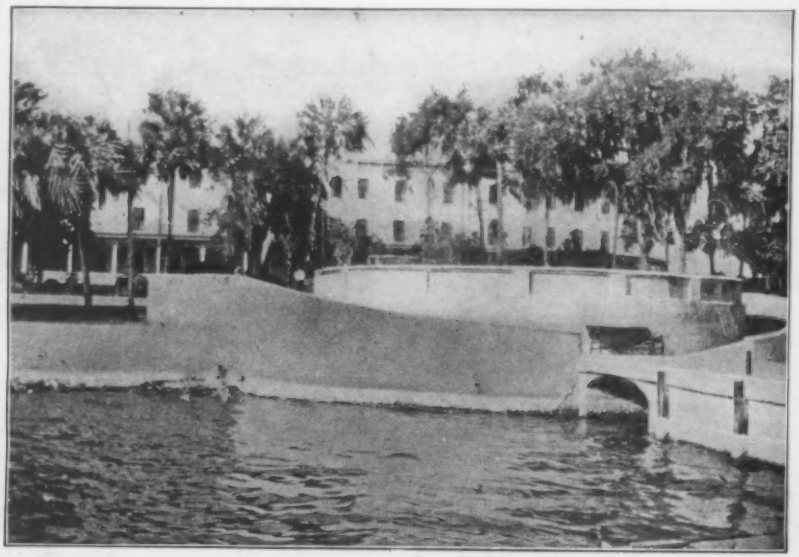

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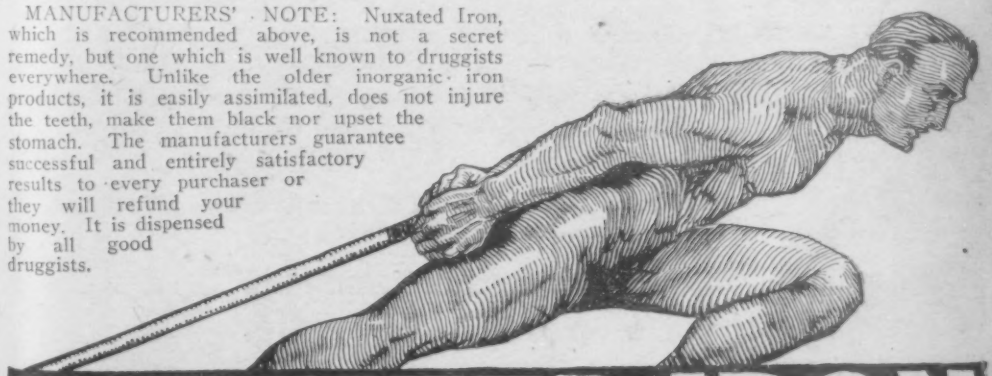

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"What for you bling 'im my place? Lep'sy! Lep'sy!" The frightened Chinaman gave Ahmun a look of horror and retreated, wobbly kneed, through the crowd, the loathsome word emanating from his lips with the hiss of an angry, cornered cobra.

Shypo leaned across the table to his companions with a loud guffaw. "Wish I'd let the bloody Chink bounce the kid and told him afterwards. T'would have done me good to watch him die of fright, the bleedin' coolie!" He glanced over his shoulder at the youth. "Poor young 'un," he added, sentimentally, "an' 'im with a girl what's straight, expectin' to get married." The thought of Aileta's virtue and her impending disappointment was too much for the tender-hearted Shypo. He tossed off his wine with a husky gulp, refilled the glass from the half-empty bottle and hollered for another quart

It was at this point that a lull in the revelry occured. A hush seemed to fall upon the crowded hall. Half-drunken men paused in the act of drinking and gazed sheepishly at each other across the litter of glasses and slender-necked bottles. The dancing girls drew their wraps about their gleaming thighs and bosoms, in tentative modesty. The reeds and guitars dropped into furtive tremolo and stopped. Nimble-footed waiters hung over the guests, fingering their coin-filled pockets, beseechingly. All eyes were turned upon the open doorway where a slender brown figure stood outlined against the night.

Awakened from her sleep by the saturnalia, Aileta had hurried down the street, wondering why Ahmun had not sought her out. She was met by curious glances and whisperings, for the news of her stricken lover had spread like wild fire up and down the street. At the last place, Vigo, the Russian mate of the Albatross had directed her to Tsi-Hung's.

A wistful, shrinking figure, half child, half woman, she advanced timidly a step or two beyond the threshold, her child-eyes searching the crowd for her lover; and beneath her clear, child-like gaze, men turned their faces in shame to the sodden images of their lost selves, and women counted the swift hours to the gray dawn, and shuddered. The lotus of passion paled, momentarily, the wine flamed less crimson in the Mephitic gloom of this bagnio, where only dream-seraphs of the trailing poppy-smoke dared intrude.

With her hand clutched at her bosom, Aileta searched the ghoulish faces in the churning miasma of betel, bhang and stale beer; and her eyes fell, abashed, for Modesty and Virtue must ever droop in shame before Moloch's brazen flaunt. Fearfully, and with the shy, hesitant dignity of youth, she moved from table to table, scanning each face in the half-gloom.

And then she found him and pounced upon him with a glad cry. Ahmun raised his head from the table and stared at her in hungry agony. Shypo Charlie started from his chair with a warning cry as she was about to flee to her lover's arms, but Ahmun sprang to his feet and placed the table between himself and the girl.

"Don't touch me!" he panted, backing against the wall.

She looked at him, bewildered, yes, scornfully.

"Wouldst thou tarry with the wine on this our wedding night, O Ahmun?" she said in sorrow. "See, I have builded a home for you on the cliffs and the choicest goat of my mother's herd is tethered by the door. Come!" She held out her hand to him across the wine-dripping table.

"Don't touch me!" he repeated, his eyes bulging from their sockets in terror. "On thy peril—!" He tore the shirt sleeve from his wrist and bared his throat. "Look!" he pointed. "Here—and—here! See! The spotted death, O Aileta!"

Attracted by the scene, the revelers deserted their tables and crowded around the boy and the girl—at a respectful distance. Curious, incredulous faces leered drunkenly over each others' shoulders.

"Throw him out, the blasted leper," a voice yelled.

"Throw him out yourself," someone retorted, pointedly, at which the voice subsided. The girl turned upon them, eyes blazing.

"Cowards! Swine!" she cried. She leaned across the table to Ahmun. "Go at

once!" she whispered: "Take the trail to the cliffs. I will follow."

O DAWN of a thousand bridal morns! O crimson-petalled flower of love, dew-pearled with the night's ecstatic tears! Ahmun, thou beloved; Ahmun, thou strong; quaff with me love's nectar cup ere the sun reddens the eastern sea; press thy lips to mine, wonderful boy; pillow thy dark head upon my breast. Sorrow and malady are things of the earth; of these, this night, we will have naught. Love's star flames low in the sky; therefore, O Ahmun, let us hasten and snatch each precious moment ere the Sun god bridges the sea with gold! Thus sang Aileta to Ahmun, the Erasian.

By the light of the spluttering candle, she spread the wedding supper of dried sharks' fins, goat's milk and China tea, and they feasted and sang and laughed at the fear in each other's eyes as all young, loving things laugh.

Now and then, Aileta's eyes turned apprehensively toward the dawn and there passed across them a film of despair. She clasped him more closely in her arms and laughed the louder, for the boy must not divine the black despair in her heart.

This night was theirs. Why waste the transcendent moments of love's star-shot hour in futile weeping? Dawn would bring the White Man and his servants to tear Ahmun from her embrace and cast him among the loathly beings upon a loathly island; but dawn still hung suspended and abeyant as if merciful of their frantic moments of ecstasy. So, she sang to him, clung to him, entwined her soft arms against his leprous cheek and gave to him love-life to light the path through the abyss.

But dawn, however merciful and reluctant, came at last; and Aileta arose sombre-eyed and trembling, and opened the lid of the old brass-bound trunk. Before Ahmun's astonished gaze she spread exquisite garments of snowy silk, a complete wedding outfit for herself and him even to the white silk turban and satin slippers. For a year, she had trudged the hot, dusty trail, morning and night from her mother's hut to town with the surplus milk of the herd, that they might on their wedding day stand arrayed as Solomon in his glory.

In the gray dawn they arrayed themselves and Ahmun threw his sheath knife upon the table, that he might stand unarmed before the altar. Aileta picked up the weapon and withdrew the long, gleaming blade from its sheath. She ran her finger down the razory edge, and shivered. Returning it to the sheath she resumed her task of dressing with an odd look in her eyes.

A little later when a draw-string in her sleeve became knotted she asked Ahmun to cut it with the knife. As he did so, she lunged against his arm, suddenly and the sharp blade slipped and made a deep gash upon his wrist. With a cry of distress she pressed her lips to the wound. Before he could prevent it she had filled her mouth with his leprous blood.

"Aileta, what have you done!" he gasped, and sank upon the couch of seaweed.

She staunched the spurting blood, kneeling beside him.

When Tsi-Hung appeared before the Resident at the unearthly hour of six A. M., wringing his fat, greasy hands and explaining volubly and amid strange gestures and gutterals that a leper was among them, the representative of His Majesty King George yawned sleepily and turned his face to the wall and told the excited Celestial to run along.

The Resident was a kindly man, and human. Under his official robe beat a heart full of compassion for all things young and in travail. He had dwelt in the Western Pacific many years and he had learned to know the tragic dark-skinned island children of this equatorial realm, as it was given to few white men to know them.

Their foibles, their joys, their sorrows and child-like simplicity found response in his lonely, tolerant heart; therefore, he took Tsi-Hung's vociferations with a grain of salt and deferred action until evening to give Ahmun a chance to—well, there were plenty of boats in the harbor and many uninhabited atolls a few hours dis-

tant from Thursday Island where a resourceful youth like Ahmun could dwell in security.

In the cool hour before dusk he went up the trail to Aileta's shanty on the cliffs and knocked on the door.

"You know why I have come," he said gravely, as the girl appeared in the doorway. He looked at her, startled. Before him stood a young, glorious creature clothed in snowy white garments. A loose, flowing robe of the finest China silk hung from her slender shoulders girdled at the waist with a narrow band of gold. Her feet were encased in white satin slippers, and about her dark hair lay coiled a slender golden cord.

The Resident pinched himself and stared hard. Was this glorious creature the little, grubby, sombre-eyed Aileta who only yesterday was minding her mother's goat herd on the scanty cliff pastures?

"I—er—is—er—" He scratched his head and blushed painfully under his coat of tan. Behind the girl stood Ahmun, turbaned and garbed as she, in a tunic of snowy white silk, gold-braided, magnificent, his dark eyes bent upon the girl in unearthly adoration.

Aileta spoke. "We have long been ready, waiting," she said softly.

The Resident shifted himself in a bewildered fashion from one foot to the other, blinking his sun-blinded eyes.

"You have not—married this boy?" he asked, incredulously.

The girl took Ahmun's hand in her own and looked up into the boy's eyes in silent joy. "Father O'Donnell was here this morning. He did not know about the—spotted death. I go with Ahmun to the Molokai," she said, simply.

The Resident gasped. "It is against the law," he said in an effort to seem severe. "You must obey the law, you know," he added, lamely.

The girl laughed. "The law! Your law!" She bared Ahmun's bandaged arm. "Look," she cried, pointing to the knife wound. "My lips have blended his blood with mine. I, too, am now a leper, so where is your law?"

And the Resident walked homeward, silenty, asking himself the same question.

TWO STORIES FOR MARCH

COMPETITION in both love and the lumber business creates a doubly interesting situation in next month's lead story. It is called JUST HIS LUCK and is by *Louise Rand Bascom,* author of OUT OF THE BURROW. See next page.

WHEN THE RED SNOW FALLS by *Chart Pitt* is the story of a whaling expedition which develops into a treasure hunt. It relates how, in the most dreaded spot on the Alaskan coast, madness overtakes the crew, and the ship's doctor finds refuge in a native burial ground.

OUT OF THE BURROW

By LOUISE RAND BASCOM

Henry might never have found himself if the theatre next door to his little antique shop hadn't burned to the ground.

OBODY ever liked Henry Pepin. Why, nobody could have told He never did a mean thing in his life and there was nothing obnoxious about his manners. Some people annoy by excessive politeness, but Henry was intemperate in nothing save his appalling, perpetual silence. This characteristic of quietness seemed accentuated by curious mole-colored hair of almost furry texture, by shadowy gray eyes, and a skin resembling that of a baby elephant in shade. A humorous or superlatively aesthetic haberdasher kept him attired in mouselike hues from the time he graduated from knickers refashioned from his father's pants. Altogether he was neutral, inarticulate, ghostlike—a phantom instinctively avoided.

Perhaps the feeling created by Henry may best be expressed by an incident which occurred when he was about fourteen. A murder trial was going on in the old red brick court house, and a crowd of us boys collected to watch the accused taken to and from the rickety jail across the street. While we were standing there, Henry a little apart as he always was, a drunkard tottered down the long flight of stone steps and staggered up to him.

"Wal, Hen-er-y Pep-in," drawled the sot, slapping the boy on the back. "What you doin' hyar? I thought you promised your God when you was born you'd stay in the woods whar you belonged!"

Whittling loungers guffawed delightedly, but Henry made no reply. The muscles of his face rolled up and down for a second, then he turned and hurried from sight, followed by boy hoots of, "Oh, you wildcat!" and sundry other names less pleasant. After that we never saw him that we did not inquire if he had dug a new burrow or if eating roots did not make his teeth yellow. When teased Henry merely smiled an ashen smile and let the taunt go, for the poor fellow lacked a natural power of expression, and the eccentric aunt with whom he lived failed to develop it. He was not sullen or shy or melancholy, it must be emphasized, but the fact that he looked so odd and kept so silent took the life out of things, and, consequently, he was not encouraged to frequent the swimming hole down by the bluet bank nor to roll corn-silk cigarettes on the mill-pond road.

In some ways we envied him. He began mounting coins and stamps and butterflies almost before he could climb into a chair by himself, and a fellow had only to inspect his collections with their neat labels and painstaking arrangement to know he had made a thorough study of what he was doing. We should have loved his things had they belonged to any other boy, but, somehow, it was impossible to enjoy them when Henry stood by silently scrutinizing a visitor's fumbling fingers. Thus, we ignored him for the most part and carried our green-backed Ciceros and Virgils to and from school, while we studied such fathomless problems as how to obtain two milk shakes for the price of one. In the end, of course, we surreptitiously purchased pipes and new tennis racquets and started for the Alma Mater whose college colors best suited our complexions.

Twelve years from that time I became assistant to Dr. Eastbrooke, originator and head of the Eastbrooke Sanitarium. It was there that Henry, the inarticulate,

came into my life again. I knew him as soon as he stalked into our consulting room followed by an attendant bearing the report of his examining physician; but Eastbrooke was rushing patients to get off to an operation, and I did not delay him by personal salutations. The newcomer oozed into a chair and studied the carpet while the chief of the institution jabbed at his report with a practised finger.

"Uh," growled Eastbrooke. "Feel pretty badly, eh?"

"Yes," acknowledged Henry.

"Where?"

Henry explained by a gesture.

"Um," grunted Eastbrooke again. "Now —er—Mr.—er—Pepin, I'd like to make another examination—just to satisfy myself, you know. But I can't at the moment. Couldn't you come back in—say —two hours?"

"Yes," admitted Henry, rising.

"Very well," decided the doctor, piloting him to the door. "Five o'clock. Take a seat out here when you come, and someone'll call you. Five o'clock."

I was tempted to add, "Eastbrooke never gets back when he says he will. Come at seven," but if I had Henry would not have sat in the hall for two hours and thus stumbled into romance.

The halls at the Eastbrooke Sanitarium, it must be explained, are long and wide, light and airy. Tables with well-cared-for palms are arranged tastefully here and there; leather-backed lounges and easy chairs, fitted with the Eastbrooke patent back, accomodate the weary health-seeker, who invariably likes to sit where he can see nurses and call boys hurrying hither and thither with wheel chairs and big blue bottles. Henry was no exception.

When Eastbrooke and I hastened back at seven o'clock, I caught a glimpse of our gray man sitting staring at the end of the hall. Without following his gaze, I knew what held his attention and experienced a momentary sense of amusement.

From our hall opens what was originally a loggia, but the rapid growth of the institution and consequent desirability of every foot of space necessitated placing windows in the open arches and utilizing the spot for a stenographers' den. Here, except during rest hours, the incessant tick of machines can be heard, if one goes near enough to listen, and many used to do so just to get a closer view of the public stenographer who was lovely as an imagined Archangel or any conceivable gloriously shining thing. Her desk stood directly in front of the double doors, always invitingly open, and the light streamed down from the great window at her back till her masses of soft hair semed irradiated with sunbeams. From time to time as she worked, her deft hand moving gracefully and without noticeable effort, she raised her eyes and swept the occupants of the hall, interestedly, sympathetically, understandingly. Such eyes! I do not know now whether they were deep violet or brown, but the remarkable thing about them lay in the whites which were as dazzlingly clear as a bit of dew-wet quartz—a fact doubtless accounting for the unusually direct, fearless expression inseparable from them.

Jane Jessup's beauty did not cease with eyes and hair. Her face was oval, softly pink, inclined to dimple. It was further perfected by curving red lips over such splendid teeth that the observer could not but think of celery and other crisp, clean things as he beheld them. Every move of Jane's meant something. When she reached for her eraser dangling on a string beside her machine, the watcher sighed and wished she would repeat the act, and when she rose to alter the window shade or pick up a sheet of fallen stationery, he prayed she might stand there indefinitely, for her feet were as trim as the rest of her and the hang of her skirts was more perfect than any picture in a fashion catalog.

It was at Jane the gray man stared—Jane, whose straight glance had a thousand times silenced the amorous babblings of bald-headed lawyer and sleek-haired travelling man; Jane, whose blunt, "What next?" had halted many a desire-mad hand guilefully nearing the back of her chair. Now she sat in the gentle radiance of her desk light, permitting rhythmic motion to succeed rhythmic motion while her audience made

her the heroine of countless fancies. One saw her carrying violets home to her waiting mother after the long day's toil; another revelled in royal dreams wherein Jane, jewelled and silken-clad, walked among obsequious courtiers and whispering ladies; some beheld her rich lips upturned for her lover's kiss, while not a few imagined her cheek against that of a slumbering child. Perhaps Henry saw only the brick of the loggia with its great black and white calendar brazenly announcing the date, but somehow I fancied he imagined himself a boy back in front of the old brick courthouse listening again to those seering words, "Wal, Hen-er-y Pep-in, what you doin' hyar? I thought you promised your God when you was born you'd stay in the woods whar you belonged!" Poor Henry! The muscles of his face were rolling up and down just as they did in those days of juvenile torture, and I found it difficult to rouse him for his appointment with its thumpings and questions.

The other doctors seldom refer cases to our offices unless an operation is indicated. Consequently, it was not unexpected when Henry was ordered to the hospital, after admitting the ownership of a respectable income. Even before he left the office I planned how I should visit him during his convalescence, for, now I was more mature, I was curious to learn if that gray mask concealed anything worth while. There must be some "open sesame." I would tell him how I once spent three weeks seeking courage to ask him to swap some green Nile postage for pink Helvetian. Perhaps if I began reminiscing I might induce him to talk about himself; but, anyhow, for the sake of the boy friendship which might have been and was not, I should look him up. Unhappily, Eastbrooke chose this opportunity to attend two medical conventions, thus leaving me in charge of his work. When pressure eased somewhat upon his return and I was enabled to ring up the hospital, Henry had gone.

The next reminder I had of him was the appearance of an odd pearwood clock on Eastbrooke's desk. It bore a tag explaining that it had been made in London at an unbelievable date by one who meant nothing to me. At the foot of the description in Henry's neat, labelling hand were the words: "To Dr. Eastbrooke from another G. P."

"Peculiar chap—that Pepin," observed the doctor, noting my interest. "Says he's feeling considerably improved. That's the way we like 'em to talk, eh!"

"You've heard from him then?" I queried.

"Heard from him, no. Ran across him down town. He's starting some sort of antique store here. I tell you we're getting to be some town when we can draw an expert on Hepplewaite sideboards and lustre tea-sets." Eastbrooke chuckled goodhumoredly and scratched his white beard with one hand as the other toyed with the usual pile of X-ray reports.

"Antique shop!" I exploded. "You don't mean he's come twenty-two hundred miles to start an antique shop here! Why, his brain's blurred! What can he do with lacquered buffets and Dutch cabinets in a town where everybody saves trading stamps to get the parlor furniture?"

"Likes the town," explained Eastbrooke. "Besides it seems he's quite an authority on out-of-the-way things. I looked the fellow up. He sells chiefly by catalog anyhow, so his exact location makes little difference. Ought to go see his shop. I stopped there a minute on my way from home this morning."

"Where is it?"

"In the Emory feed and grain building, right next to the Warwick Hotel. He's made quite a—" Eastbrooke's finger jabbed down on a report before him. "Why hasn't this duodenal ulcer case been sent me?" he snapped. "Mrs. J. M. Smith. Look her up."

Mechanically I glanced down to catch the name of Mrs. Smith's physician and picked up the telephone to make the necessary queries. Antique shop! A suitable occupation for Henry surely! Somehow the mustiness and dust and age which one associates with such places seemed a fitting environment for him, but why had he established a business in that particular

town? It was not until I went out to lunch that the explanation burst upon me and even then it struck me as preposterous. Nevertheless, there sat Henry by Jane Jessup's desk, wistfully watching her face as she typed rapidly from a pile of notes he had laid beside her. His attitude was so forlorn I sauntered down to shake hands with him.

"Hello, old chap," I said, "hear you've become a citizen of our little burg."

"Yes," acknowledged Henry

"That's good," I floundered. As I anticipated, no conversation arose, and I was forced to add lamely, "I see you can't break away entirely from the San."

"It's the typing," smiled Jane, running another piece of paper under her roller. "Mr. Pepin's been used to girls who use the search system. Our rapidity and accuracy have dazzled him. Isn't that so, Mr. Pepin?"

"Yes," admitted Henry with a trace of confusion.

"Well, I hope I'll see something of you," I hazarded, turning to leave. "Drop in on me."

"Thanks," murmured Henry, and when I glanced back he was leaning forward in his wicker chair staring at Jane as if I had never broken his reverie.

Ensuing observation disclosed the fact that Henry arrived every morning at ten with a bundle of letters, but he never ventured dictation. Instead, he made marginal notes on the correspondence he was obliged to answer and entire outlines of matters requiring new letters, and the rest was turned over to Jane. While she did the work he sat and watched her on the pretext of waiting the results of her labor. When she finished he dumbly took the beautifully typed sheets and somehow vanished. Occasionally he brought a potted white hyacinth with him or a diminutive nosegay of unusual flowers. These he invariably laid on the desk without remark, and without remark Jane rose and indifferently stuck them behind the screen at her left or up in the window. Patient succeeded patient, various sanitarium employes took their vacations and returned, a year passed, but there seemed no change in the relationship between Henry and Jane. He always sat in the same chair without endeavoring to move an inch nearer. She continued to raise her eyes to his in the impartial way she had. And yet—I never felt such an electrical atmosphere. I told myself it was fancy, but just the same I fairly tingled from contact with unloosed vibrations. Was that power emanating from Henry? If so, surely passion would break his bonds of silence; but it did not.

About this time, Guy Link, a new man in the eye department, took to rushing Jane. He was big and dark, with pleasing manners and a delightfully colorful way of talking. He managed to extract more smiles from Jane than anyone I ever saw with her, and I told my sister, who was taking the nurse's training, that Henry would at last withdraw or buck up and say something; but he merely stuck to his schedule, thus leaving the drama of the gray man and the pink lady as static as before. I began to wish there was some way of incorporating a bit of action into the play, and resolved, not without kind motives, to stir things up. The next time, therefore, that Eastbrooke stepped into a neighboring office when Jane chanced to be disengaged I strolled toward her desk with a stenographer's joke I had been saving for the occasion.

She wore a soft golden-brown sweater, I remember, something with yellow letters, and, although it was winter, a small bunch of yellow primroses snuggled against her breast. For a time we chatted pleasantly, our words half buried by the click of other machines, and then, as I made ready to depart, I threw out, with well-acted carelessness:

"Say, Pepin's getting to be quite a steady of yours!"

"He's prompt about his correspondence," evaded Jane.

"I don't mean it that way," I teased her, relying on her friendship for my sister as an excuse for my impertinence. "I mean he's crazy about you." Silence. Whereupon I demanded flatly, "Didn't you know he was in love with you?"

"How should I?" retorted Jane evenly,

but I fancied there was a sudden weariness in her tone.

"Hasn't he told you?"

"Of course not," she flared.

"I suppose he wouldn't," I meditated. "Poor chap, he doesn't know how to talk." *I said this sympathetically*, and Jane regarded me with new confidence. Twice she half-opened he lips before she said, as if it were a relief to unbosom herself:

"He's a wonderful man! He makes me feel things no other man ever did." When the solemnity of this statement had fully impressed me, she added, "I don't mind his not talking. I understand it. I was brought up that way myself. Father thought children should be seen and not heard. As a result I didn't talk for so many years I got tongue-tied—afraid of the sound of my own voice." A look of pain hovered in her face. "I've suffered agonies over it!"

"You!" I jeered. "What an imagination you have!"

"It's true!" she stormed. "It was only by most desperate means I taught myself to carry on a conversation. There are more people like that than you know," she ended bitterly.

We contemplated one another a moment before I ventured, "Do I take this to mean you and Henry—"

"You think it's a joke," she flung back, fancying irony I did not intend. "It's no joke. Of course I know Henry Pepin loves me—a woman always knows." She colored slightly and continued, "I can't consider it any affair of yours, but I don't mind telling you I'd—I'd ask him to marry me—in spite of his looks and his silence, but—"

"But?" I insistently repeated.

"I—oh, can't you see, I—I can't quite bring myself to force the issue with a man everything avoids. I understand why it is and yet—I haven't worked out a solution. I can't seem to. The other day I saw him try to give an apple to a little girl, and she ran away screaming, scared to death. It hurt Mr. Pepin terribly. It hurt me!" she cried almost above the tick of other machines. "I do know this, though," she finished passionately, "if I ever saw a single thing—I don't care what it was—*trust* him once, act as if it wasn't afraid of him, I'd—I'd make him marry me on the spot! Now go tell it," she added with defiance and pretended to be searching for something in a desk drawer.

I was thankful when Guy Link bounced in and gave me a chance to get away without reply, for I did not know what to say. It really seemed incredible that anything so dead-looking and dead-acting as Henry should have aroused such feeling in a remarkable girl like Jane. Again I saw the dusty little street at home with its loitering sows and slouching loafers, again I heard that jocular greeting, "Wal, Hener-y Pep-in, what you doin' hyar? I thought you promised your God when you was born you'd stay in the woods whar you belonged!" I felt a great pity for Henry. Life had been as gray for him as his personality, and now he must lose the girl who might have dispelled his enshrouding mist.

There could be little doubt that he would lose her, for Link was with Jane constantly. Of course it was possible they had reached a friendly understanding, for men and women can enjoy one another's society these days without being sweethearts, but this seemed improbable when Link left an office full of patients to steal off for a word with her. She even went riding in his little three hundred and eighty-five dollar Gadwell, and once I caught them feeding on tinned crab and café parfait at the Warwick Hotel, the town's one aristocratic hostelry. It had been built by a man who had made a fortune out of vanilla extract, and, not knowing what to do with his money, he had put up a sort of memorial to himself. Not many guests could afford to stay there, but if they could the place afforded suites as luxurious as anything to be found in New York. To most of us it was a name except when we wished to impress an out-of-town friend or went down to some play in its theatre. Like the hotel, the theatre was out of proportion to the town, but it seemed to draw good houses and because of this many excellent artists sang or acted there. I seldom found time

for such excitement, but now and then Dr. Eastbrooke told me to use his box, and on such occasions I never beheld the ivory W on the red plush curtain without being aware that Jane and Link were facing it too. They gave the impression of being there for everything, and I felt resentment toward Jane for the way she must be smiling at having fooled me. I had started out to tease her and she had ended by teasing me. Somehow it did not seem fair to Henry.

While I was wondering what I could do to help his cause, the Warwick Hotel with its expensive murals and hodge-podge of prized art works burned to the ground. It was one of those impressive, red fires which the whole community turned out to watch and enjoy because Warwick could well afford to erect another memorial if he desired and because no one was hurt. When the crowd dispersed the only thing left of the town's much advertised inn was a ten story brick wall towering above the little two-story Emory feed and grain building like a Gibraltar over a pebble. The police promptly roped out a safety zone, posted warning notices, and forbade the occupants of the Emory building to return to their offices until the wall was torn down. At the time, the officials had every intention of obliterating the menace at once, but a late March blizzard swirled through the streets next day and all available men were utilized to clear traffic-blocked avenues. Meanwhile the wall showed no signs of descent.

Henry sent his one gay-tied young clerk on a vacation and left his store door locked except as he stole to his office to consult his files, but the feed and grain store proprietors were less prudent. It was in the spring of the year when they were having their biggest business. Farmers, with pussy willow sprays in their hats, drove in from miles out in the country, and they hunted up the Emorys and protested against returning home without the onion sets, the timothy and clover for which they had come. As a result the store was opened at first cautiously, with many tentative glances toward the gigantic wall; later, with abating fear since several days passed without catastrophe. They realized that the city officials were exceedingly culpable in their neglect of the wall and in their relaxed vigilance regarding their own rules, but the seed sales were so large that outside matters were of little import.

The expected and the unexpected came to pass. About noon one day that colossal wall roared down on the little building and crushed it into the ground like a nautilus shell under a wagon-load of bricks. Again the inefficient and badly scared police took hold. They said a portion of the wall had not yet fallen and tried to drive back would-be rescuers, but the store had been full of people and their moans and cries coupled with the shrieks of parrots and various animals kept by Emory Brothers drove passers-by half insane. Men and women rushed into the sickening pile of debris and tore at it with fingernails, working feverishly, frenziedly, rather impotently, yet unmindful of the remaining wall or the threats of the blue-coated preservers of law.

As soon as I heard of the accident I asked Eastbrooke to let me go down with the ambulance surgeon, and thus I, too, had an opporuntiy to dig around among plastered, splintered lath, twisted bird cages and shifting seed. When night came a number of men, some still and some groaning, had been unearthed, and a red-shirted fellow near me suggested casually that he reckoned we'd got about all. It was then I went to the public telephone again to make sure Henry had not returned to his boarding place, and, as before, the landlady reiterated the statement that she was sure he had gone to his office that morning. Her voice sounded extremely unreal and ethereal somehow, for all the time she was talking, I kept hearing the drawl of a drunkard silhouetted against a dusty village street: "Wal, Hener-y Pep-in, what you doin' hyar? I thought you promised your God when you was born you'd stay in the woods whar you belonged!" Choking, I dashed back to the debris determined not to leave until I found him. As I searched here and there, my gloves torn and my hands raw, Henry became very dear to me. He had always

done the best he could! If I had tried I might have developed him more. I thought of all the times when I might have said something nice to him and had not, of those faraway days when my gang had practically ostracised him; I smelled the soft bluet bed, saw the bending willows by the creek, and grieved that he had not known them. I thought of his coming to the sanitarium, lonely and without friends, and how, beyond being present at his operation and fixing one dressing afterward, I had done nothing for him. I thought of how he had been in town over a year and I had failed to invite him to a meal or to offer him the courtesy of a call, and now— Searchlights sizzled on; many in the crowd were superseded by others. Street cars clanged slowly by in order that the motormen might better view the rescue work; red lights showed here and there. A cold mist closed down, and still we worked, well-dressed business men besides bare-necked laborers.

I came across bits of quaint decorative mirrors of other days; also, torn tapestries nailed down by bricks, but mostly the pile was white dust and rent boards. At last after an eternity of slipping and stumbling, shouts and much listening, raw day dawned. I felt faint and unsteady on my legs, but I refused to leave lest Henry be discovered in my absence. An unquenchable desire filled me to be near him, to help him if I could. It would in some small way compensate me for the memory of the things I had left undone, and so I swallowed the coffee somebody handed me in a very tinny tin cup, and stayed where I was.

During the morning, as shoveled debris thudded to one side, I became aware of two figures pacing up and down, back and forth, on the opposite side of the street. For several hours the two continued their monotonous strolling till the very unendingness of it irritated me and I glanced up to discover that the walkers were Jane and Link. Their presence infuriated me. It was monstrous that they should be indulging in silly exercise and curiosity, or possibly love glances, when Henry lay dead or pinioned under that stifling mass of litter, and I wished for authority to order them away! Not having it, I threw greater energy into my search, and about eleven o'clock we came upon him, held fast by a weathered beam. Easily as we could we lifted him and staggered over sliding bricks to the sidewalk, only to find that the ambulance had been called off. There was nothing to do but lay him down, and as soon as that breathing bundle of gray was deposited on the cold cement, Jane rapidly crossed the street followed by Link, who was murmuring something to the effect that it was wonderful how safes could be made to withstand such falls!

I did not want to see the newcomers, and bent over the collector in an attempt to be oblivious of them. "Henry," I said compellingly. "Henry—drink this. The ambulance will be here in a minute."

He opened his eyes and smiled. "Never mind," he responded, unclosing his right hand significantly. My glance shifted from his face to see nestling in his hand a small yellow canary bird. It was unhurt, apparently unfrightened, and evinced no desire to fly away.

"Never mind about me," repeated Henry, and there was a ring in his voice indicating that down there in the dirt and dark a new power had come to him—the most prized gift in the world, namely that of stating his thoughts audibly. "Never mind about me," he insisted again, blinking before the sun which had suddenly shot from behind the clouds. "Look out for the bird, will you? It needs food," he added, "and water. It—it fluttered into my hand down there in hell. Came when I was gasping for breath and wanting to die. It—why—it comforted me and gave me courage. It didn't want to get away—the little cuss. It—it trusted me."

He gazed up at us appealingly, and somehow he no longer looked gray, but golden in the sunlight, bright as the canary in his hand; and Jane looked golden, too, as she dropped on her knees beside him. She was not crying, but joyous-eyed, and, unmindful of us all, she pressed her lips to his.

THE DOGS OF DEATH

By CHART PITT

In a land where dog worship is the religion, the philosophy, the popular science and the indoor sport of the inhabitants, it is poor judgment to kick a dog into the middle of a banquet table.

THE warning growl of a wolf-dog brought Burntwater Bill Duncan to the door of his sod hut on the outskirts of Anidar, where a handful of white men had buried themselves in the interest of the fur trade. His deep-set eyes took in the wide sweep of the Siberian foreland, gray and lean and hopeless, like the lives of those who peopled her lonely coasts. Burntwater's face was softened with a touch of wistful longing. For plodding across the tundra towards him, came Rusty Nolan, the one man on the fur coast he was proud to call brother. The red headed Irishman was bringing his lead-dog with him—fastened to the end of a rawhide thong.

The trader wondered what was in the wind. Man and dog were inseparable companions; but this was the first time he had seen the lithe limbed malamute in leash.

"A pair of thoroughbreds, if God ever made 'em," the man by the sod hut muttered in his scraggly beard.

"I'm going on a trip for the summer and I want you to take care of Swiftfoot till I come back." Rusty's voice was full of sunshine, as it always was, but there was something in his eyes that gave his cheerful words the lie.

"What's the idea—leaving the only good dog behind?" the older man questioned.

Nolan waved his hand toward the far line of hills that lifted their blue noses out of the haze of the hinterland.

"It's over there I'm going, Bill, and I haven't any right to take Swiftfoot into danger. You take care of her, Bill. I'll do as much for you some time—if—"

"You know what it means Rusty." Burntwater's voice dropped into the dead, monotonous measures of despair. "More than one man from Anidar has tried to trade with the Stunted Tribes over there—and none of them ever came back."

"I know." The red headed man swallowed hard to clear his throat. "I suppose I'm a fool, Bill, but them hills have been calling to me ever since I came to the fur coast—like it did to the other fellows who went—and I've just got to go."

He reached out an impulsive hand and gripped the lean fingers of his friend. The trader stood there speechless, holding the rawhide lead-string in his hand, and watched Rusty Nolan go swinging away across the tundra—and out of his life.

"His last thought was about his dog—God, that was a man!" The trader gulped. Kindness to dumb animals had always been a passport to his heart. His troubled eyes stared out across the lean, bleak marshes to the far line of barrier hills behind which lay the country of the dreaded Polar Dwarfs.

Those runted devils had never left the shelter of their own hermit kingdom—but their reputation had travelled the length and breadth of the Siberian foreland.

Unbelievable tales had come down to the surf flailed beaches of the fur coast. Burntwater Bill had tried to forget about them. Now his friend had joined that army of adventurers—who went—and were forgotten.

Like others of his kind, Burntwater had grown hardened to the shifting fortunes of the fur trade. He had seen good seasons, when every trader's pocket was full of gold. He had seen lean years, when the nights were filled with the whimper of starving wolf-dogs. But that mysterious

hinterland had remained the same—a thing of hope—a thing of horror, to tempt and torture with its inhumane mockery.

Legend said that unmapped country was peopled by a race of mad midgets, who measured out their fiendish iron law in the silence of the polar wilderness. But across the barrier hills were inky skinned sables, that could be bought for an iron ax—or a box of sulphur matches.

That afternoon Burntwater Bill stood beside the sod hut and watched a shifting speck far out in the northern marshes, where Rusty Nolan was taking advantage of the last snow flurry of the season to answer the call of the *ultima thule* of the fur lands.

Swiftfoot lifted her trim nose to the northern skies, and sounded the shivering death-call of her kind—a morbid challenge to that team of mongrels, with Pirate, the big wolf-hound, in the lead.

BURNTWATER BILL became more silent and thoughtful than ever. Summer came with its swift, fierce heat. The tundras blossomed out like a tropic meadow. Then autumn crept down out of the north, burying the coasts of Anidar under its velvet haze. Still no traveler returned from that lost land of the Polar Dwarfs.

One morning Burntwater Bill was awakened by the voice of geese, fleeing in terror of the winter that was riding downwind on their trail. The trader staggered to the door of the hut, for one last look toward the vampire land that had claimed Rusty Nolan as its prey. With a hopeless gesture he turned away from the empty landscape. His face was as hard and relentless as that lean wilderness of which he was a part.

His voice cracked like the frozen lash of a dog whip, as he routed out the malamutes and harnessed them to his sled. "It's over after Rusty we're going, lassie," he whispered into Swiftfoot's ear as he gave her the place of honor at the head of his thoroughbred team.

The stinging north wind had covered the wet tundra-moss with a coating of ice; and when the trader turned his back upon Anidar that morning he was ready for the desperate venture friendship had thrust upon him—ready to the last shoestring.

It was not a load of trade goods he carried—but food and ammunition. It was a relief party and a punitive expedition rolled together. At the bottom of the cargo was a light racing sled of whalebone, a contrivance that was intended for flight. That was his one and only concession to possible defeat.

Other men had gone out upon that perilous trail dreaming of inky-skinned sables—and the northern stars kept watch over their unmarked bones. But as Burntwater Bill plodded deeper and deeper into that land of silence, he was planning every detail of the return trip. The fact that there had been no return for the many who had gone that way before, made no difference to him.

Three times in the naked tundra he paused to build a cairn of northern peat to hold provisions for the homeward journey.

At last in the shifting gray of an arctic twilight, Burntwater Bill caught a glimpse of stunted willow thickets on the skyline ahead. For an hour he had been dragging his weary body along behind the sled. Every muscle ached from the hard miles he had tramped since leaving his last camp. But now he called sharply to the dogs, and they swept through the gloom in a new burst of speed, and into the welcome shelter of a thicket.

Soon a fire of willow twigs was leaping in the mushy gloom of the northern night. By the time it had reduced itself to embers Burntwater had built his last cache. There he left the whalebone sled, extra harnesses, food and weapons.

After a short rest he set out upon the last lap of his journey. Just ahead he could see the ragged peaks of the barrier mountains, like a mouthful of broken teeth thrust up against the flickering stars. Before him lay the unmapped miles, a threat unspoken; something that words could not express.

Burntwater set his course by the stars. For that flat land was traced by nothing more reliable than wolf trails that shifted

and faded in the dead gray gloom. Here and there a patch of stunted willows rose up out of the murk. The north wind began its eerie fretting across the frozen marshes like the souls of men who still searched for the homeward trail.

The short winter day came and went, and its last light was fading into the empty dark, when Burntwater Bill stumbled into a beaten trail and knew that his journey was almost at an end. As he plodded on, the trader's sharp eyes caught the glint of starlight reflected from some white object in the moss beside the trail. He stumbled forward, and his hands reached out in stubborn quest. Then he reeled backward, his lean fingers clutching at a human skull.

"A white man," he groaned. "Someone who died on the trail—with his face toward Anidar."

As he pressed deeper into the unknown, other white objects leered at him from the trailside, mocking him with their sinister, sightless eyes.

Then the empty sweep of the winter night was broken by a pin-point of firelight flickering in the gloom ahead.

Swiftfoot sounded her challenge to the lonely silences. The accumulated grief of a million years throbbed in that morbid call. It was answered by other voices out of the darkness ahead, far, yapping voices that might have been mistaken for echoes, but for their discord.

The weary traveler caught the welcome smell of turf smoke in the wind. The yap of mongrel dogs grew louder as Burntwater Bill swung his team around a corner of the hill, and swept down into a sheltered valley that blinked with the red eyes of peat fires, flickering under a gauzy film of smoke.

The wind freshened, raising its fretting lament among the frozen willows. Burntwater pumped a cartridge into the barrel of his rifle as he rode down toward the camp.

Voices called a welcome out of the darkness. The man upon the sled started at the sound. The crouching battle-poise fell from him, and he slipped the rifle into its place upon the load.

It was the ancient tongue of the Korik Tribes, such as the old men of Anidar sometimes used when the muddy moss-wine had carried their thoughts back to the scenes of their childhood.

Those gray headed granddads were a power in Anidar. Much of the fur trade hung upon their beck and nod. Burntwater Bill had spent many months in mastering that almost forgotten tongue. He never had regretted it however, for it had put him in touch with the inner soul of that strange tribe, reeking with the lore and logic of a forgotten age.

With no oaths whispered, and no promises made, he found himself welcome among a brotherhood that was almost a freemasonry of tundraland.

Now he flung back their answering hail—a word that marked him a brother. With renewed confidence he pushed on. No doubt here in the fastness of the unmapped hills he would find the higher degrees of that brotherhood of which he had learned the primary truths in the smoky reek of a native hut, down there by the Anidar. But his search would not end here. It must be that there was some savage tribe farther inland, that had proved Rusty Noland's undoing.

A multitude of mongrel dogs swarmed out to meet him. There was no challenge in their throats, just the whimper of animals that expect food.

Behind them straggled the people who spoke the ancient dialect. The trader saw at a glance that they were also of the Stunted Tribes. But these hairy faced dwarfs picked their way among the crowding dogs, without even ruffling a hair upon the back of a mangy cur.

Burntwater Bill met them with open arms—as he would have met any men, white, black or yellow, who loved dogs. The stunted tribesmen formed a guard of honor about him, and together they went down to the peat fires.

A white haired grandfather of the midgets tottered out to meet them. The old man placed a caressing hand upon the slick coat of one of the malamutes. Burntwater lifted his voice in warning, for it was Gray Face, the lead-dog whose place

had been taken by Swiftfoot. His temper had been getting worse every day since they had left the fur coast. But the words came too late. The animal slashed at the withered hand and leaped snarling away.

Burntwater reached for his rifle. He had seen a hundred dead men stretched out beneath the northern stars, all because of a little trouble over dogs.

The old patriarch lifted his mangled talon to the firelight, and the red blood gushed out over his fur garments.

It was the signal for the battle to begin.

But no roar of rage answered him. With the drawn face of a religious fanatic he pressed his lips to the lacerated flesh, and returned to his hut.

The midgets swarmed out of the shadows. "The Chief waits for the brother who came across the big snows," one of them whispered as they led the way to one of the huts.

Burntwater found the chief to be a man of middle-age, and rather larger than the average run of the stunted tribesmen. The room was littered with cooked food. A bowl filled with reindeer stew was steaming at his elbow.

"The wild goose comes up from the south, and the tribe gives a feast, that the birds may not forget to return to their nesting-grounds," the royal epicure mumbled as he dipped into the stew. "Now a stranger comes across the big snows with the word of brotherhood upon his lips. To-morrow a feast will be spread and the sacred dogs of death will renew their covenant with the chosen people."

As Burntwater Bill turned away he noticed an emblem swinging from the thick neck of the chief. Lover of dogs that he was, it gave him a turn. It was a hound carved from red rock, resembling jade in its texture. Later he noticed others of the tribe with that same scarlet emblem swinging at their hairy throats.

The trader had lived among all manner of heathen tribes, and had seen them bow down before their strange gods. He had tolerated the idols they worshipped, beasts, birds and fishes—even reptiles there had been in that religious zoo—but never had there been a dog.

Burntwater sat beside the turf fire, pondering these things in his mind. Something sniffed at his sleeve. He looked up—and horror clutched him with its icy hands.

There beside him stood Pirate, the big wolf-hound that had led Rusty Nolan's team of mongrels into the wilderness. The animal's hairy lips were parted in a leering grin of recognition.

It was here then among these peaceful midgets that his friend had met his fate.

He scanned the rabble of dogs that roved about the fires. Other familiar animals flitted into the light, and were gone again upon their endless quest of bones.

Mongrels they had been one and all. Here they were gathered in this canine paradise, where even a slash from their cowardly fangs was considered an honor.

Burntwater Bill swore under his breath, vowing to put an end to the threat that had hung over the trading settlements of Anidar. He realized, however, that they had made it difficult for him to use force. The hairy faced midgets had called him brother, and were going to spread a feast in his honor in the morning. Their kind toleration of the dogs touched him in a soft spot, yet the other traders had vanished and their mongrel teams remained. Would he, too, become one of the missing, and the next adventurer find his string of blooded malamutes growing fat and degenerate in the camp of the Stunted Tribes?

A dozen sub-chiefs pressed him with invitations to spend the night in their huts. But the trader preferred his sleeping-bag, with nothing but the thin blue haze of peat smoke between him and the frosty stars. Time and again he awoke, shaken by troublesome dreams. At last the dragging hours brought the first faint flush of the dawn—and the feast.

The turf fires flared up among the shadows, and the native women came shuffling out of the huts, loaded with food. Bowls of sun-baked clay were filled with reindeer stew; and the rock tables were heaped with little cakes made from the wild rice that grew among the flooded marshes.

Jugs of muddy moss-wine passed two and fro. Young and old shared alike in the feast.

The last stars began to fade before the slow encroachment of the dawn. The natives lingered over their wine-mugs and cast impatient glances at the brightening sky. They were waiting for something to happen. The trader himself began to grow uneasy under the strain.

At last the sunless daylight had reached its full measure of languid gray above the naked fangs of the unmapped mountains. Then from far up the valley a rawhide drum sounded its lifeless thud. It was answered by another from the edge of the village.

There was the clatter of a hundred wooden mugs set down as one. The feasting tribesmen stiffened themselves beside the tables. A breath of expectancy rushed into their nostrils, like a whistling, snoring chorus. Then all was still.

The patter of feet sounded among the huts of the encampment, and a native runner dashed past, and out upon the flat country that stretched away to the south.

Burntwater sat up staring. A trained sprinter never would have wasted that burst of speed at the beginning of a race. Yet surely this was no amateur affair that had frozen the half-drunken natives into staring statues beside the feast tables.

On the runner swept, and was lost in the bleak, frozen marshes that stretched their lean miles toward the Anidar coast.

"Where's the other runner?" the trader nudged the nearest native.

The dwarf turned his eyes away from the spot where the fleet-footed tribesman had disappeared and moved his head in a sweeping gesture that indicated the upper reaches of the valley.

Burntwater Bill looked—and an angry curse blurted upon his lips.

Ten monstrous red hounds came lumbering along on the man's trail. Not with a burst of speed such as the native had indulged in, but with a lazy confidence, as though they had run that race of death before and knew the spot where they would find a spent runner floundering among the marshes.

So this was the covenant of the sacred red dogs! This had been the fate of the traders who had travelled that road before him. With a sickening horror the trader realized that he, too had become one of that band of missing adventurers, whose homing song no longer broke the brooding silence of the Siberian tundras.

Burntwater Bill staggered to his feet. Every muscle in his lean body was trembling with a lust to kill. His deep-set eyes measured the distance of the lumbering hounds as he dragged his heavy belt-gun from its holster.

But the midgets rushed at him like an army of ants, and dragged him down into his seat. The death hounds lumbered on around a shoulder of the hill. As they passed out of sight they filled that bleak, sunless world with their gruesome challenge. It was the voice of a four-footed Cain, gloating over his depravity.

Burntwater Bill sank weakly into his seat. A lover of dogs he always had been until that moment, but he had seen enough of dog worship to last him for the rest of his life. His very soul flamed with a hatred for the mangy curs that swarmed about the feasting grounds.

One of the animals came crowding between the trader's legs, searching for bones. For a moment the white brother towered above the black faced dwarfs, a squirming dog in his lifted hand. Then he let the animal drop—and kicked as he did in gridiron days. His foot landed with a thud in the belly of the falling cur. It shot out over the heads of the tribesmen and landed among the tables.

With a bellow of fury the stunted clan surged over the man who had come across the big snows—the traitor who had come with the word of brotherhood upon his lips and had broken the faith by kicking a dog.

His flailing blows crumbled a score of runts upon the trampled moss, but a hundred more sprang to take their places. Like leeches they clung to his body, and dragged him down. A moment later Burntwater Bill lay trussed among the wrecked feast tables.

Like a flock of ants dragging a beetle,

the tribesmen moved their prisoner to a cave in the side of the hill. Without a word they thrust him in, and rolled a heavy boulder across the opening.

In the cold silence of his rock cell, the trader lay thinking of the terrible scene he had witnessed, and wondering if he, too, would be turned out before the hounds.

Darkness settled over that land of lonely silences—and with it came Swiftfoot. For an hour she mourned beside the barrier rock. Then Burntwater sent her away with a curse. How he hated dogs!

After hours of mental agony, broken by minutes of troubled sleep, the trader saw the daylight begin to filter in around the barrier rock. He heard the sound of feet climbing the hill. The boulder grated against the solid wall, as a multitude of hands heaved at its polished sides, and the next moment Burntwater Bill was dragged out into the frosty silence of the morning.

A flurry of snow had fallen in the night, and the gale had whipped it into drifts as far as the eye could see.

There was a sinister note in the wind as it whined among the lean hills. Not a word was spoken. A tribesman slashed the cords from his limbs, and rubbed the circulation back into his numbed muscles. Then they shoved him down the hill ahead of them.

Back of the village they paused. The black faced runts squinted anxiously toward the southeast, where the laggard winter dawn was growing brighter in the frosty skies.

Then the dull thud of the death drum sounded at the head of the valley. Like an echo another dull, dead note boomed out from the village. Eager hands thrust Bill out among the snowdrifts, his face turned toward the distant shores of Anidar—and death following upon his trail.

The trader turned and flung back a mocking laugh at them. The dwarfs did not know that he was the owner of the fastest dog team in the north. In that land where every man runs behind his sled, the pace of dogs becomes the pace of man. As he sprang away across the frozen marshes, Burntwater felt confident that he would lead the red butchers farther afield than ever they had been forced to go to find their prey.

Not in silent desperation did he fly, as the native had the day before. In the fur trade the prize skins always fell to the swiftest runner. Taking slim chances had come to be second nature to him. Now this was to be his last race—the last opportunity he would have to show them what sort of stuff Bill Duncan was made of. He ran as though under the admiring eyes of the grandstand.

As he swung over the shoulder of the hill he paused for one backward glance, waved his hand in a gesture of contempt, and trotted down the ridge and out of sight.

As soon as he was hidden from the village Burntwater Bill sprang into the trail-gait that had been acquired behind the swiftest string of malamutes on the Siberian coast.

In some strange way it was not of death that he thought, but of the race. His last battle would be fought far beyond that of the swiftest runner who had gone down that trail. He was fully determined upon that one point.

The miles reeled by, and the bellow of the pack did not draw noticeably closer. Perhaps the red hounds thought there was no need for haste, but he would show them. Hope of ultimate success began to return to him. His mind went racing across the frozen fens, to a clump of stunted willows where his spare outfit was hidden. With a rifle in his hands he would give them an unexpected welcome, one that would last them for all time. Then he would return for his team—and settle with the dwarfs for the murder of Rusty Nolan.

But his speculation was broken by the mournful song of the hounds, drawing closer across the snow. Hope flickered out once more, and only the race remained.

His would be a story that would be whispered around the peat fires of the stunted clans, until it took its place among the legends of that bleak land.

Burntwater Bill was reeling with exhaustion as he swept down the beaten trail, past the spot where the swiftest

runner had fallen, and on across the rolling tundras where the purple haze of night already was beginning to gather. He topped a long slope and turned back for one look behind. His breath was coming in whistling gasps, and his lungs seemed filled with liquid fire.

There at the foot of the hill the death hounds followed swift and sure upon his track. Beyond them was another blotch that reeled drunkenly among the shadows.

At first Burntwater thought it was the chief, coming to witness the kill. Then he saw it was another pack of dogs. He thrilled at the sight. Even the dull-witted dwarfs had noticed his speed and sent a pack of swifter animals to reinforce the hounds.

Burntwater Bill filled his lungs with the frosty air and reeled away into the gathering night. As he ran he could hear the footfalls of the pack and the snap of their cruel jaws. It was only a matter of minutes before they would be upon him.

At last he stumbled and fell. He scrambled to his feet but made no further attempt to run. This was the end of the trail for him. With straining muscles he turned to meet his fate.

In that moment the two blotches that raced toward him were blended into one—a writhing, bellowing mass, cursed with the death shrieks of the wild.

To Burntwater Bill that call seemed to be a part of the life he had known at Anidar—the mad scramble for gold that was slipping away from him forever. Then his own battle-cry sounded full and strong across the white miles of the snow plain, a rallying call that held nothing of fear. For among the lumbering forms of the death hounds he recognized the lean, lithe shapes of his own malamutes.

With an easy, graceful swiftness they darted among the dogs of death. With measured exactness their sharp fangs slashed at jugular vein and ham string. One moment the skirts of the northern night was cursed with the medley of battle. The next, a thin half-circle of motionless dogs lifted their noses to the sky and sobbed out the wailing measures of the death-lament.

There, too, was Swiftfoot, the dog he had cursed and sent away. But how was she to know that Burntwater Bill hated all dogs now? With a whimper of gladness she bounded toward him, and his lean arms closed about her.

Then the trader reeled back in the grip of a new madness, a piece of paper clutched in his trembling fingers.

It was a message that had been fastened to the dog's neck, now soaked with blood from the battle. Frantically he searched for a match among his clothing, struck it, and held the paper in the light of the flame.

"God didn't intend Rusty Nolan for dog-food," the trader whispered as he caught sight of the familiar writing.

"Dear Bill—

Don't touch a dog—for the love of your life. They kill men here for that. I did—but my red hair saved me. They turned me into a priest—high custodian to a red-dog idol. I'm in a cave on the west side of the mountain—Swiftfoot knows where.

I planned to get away all summer—but you can't do much when its always daylight. Then Swiftfoot showed up last night, and I knew you'd come to find me.

They bring furs to sacrifice to the idol. I've hid out the best of them to take back to Anidar. Wait till they send out the hounds. Then sneak away and come. But be careful, for the law prohibits anybody from leaving the village for twenty-four hours after the race of the sacrifice.

The coast will be clear then—only two old priests with me—and I'll take care of them.

Rusty."

"We've got till daylight to-morrow morning to get the outfit and make it back to the Temple," Burntwater Bill gulped as he patted the lead-dog's head and turned his face once more to the south.

"We'll make it like a walk-away, you blooded little aristocrats of tundraland," he called back to the following malamutes. "But I'll have to break an old rule, and ride on the sled part of the way—for I was doing *my bit* in the running line, if you noticed."

hinterland had remained the same—a thing of hope—a thing of horror, to tempt and torture with its inhumane mockery.

Legend said that unmapped country was peopled by a race of mad midgets, who measured out their fiendish iron law in the silence of the polar wilderness. But across the barrier hills were inky skinned sables, that could be bought for an iron ax—or a box of sulphur matches.

That afternoon Burntwater Bill stood beside the sod hut and watched a shifting speck far out in the northern marshes, where Rusty Nolan was taking advantage of the last snow flurry of the season to answer the call of the *ultima thule* of the fur lands.

Swiftfoot lifted her trim nose to the northern skies, and sounded the shivering death-call of her kind—a morbid challenge to that team of mongrels, with Pirate, the big wolf-hound, in the lead.

BURNTWATER BILL became more silent and thoughtful than ever. Summer came with its swift, fierce heat. The tundras blossomed out like a tropic meadow. Then autumn crept down out of the north, burying the coasts of Anidar under its velvet haze. Still no traveler returned from that lost land of the Polar Dwarfs.

One morning Burntwater Bill was awakened by the voice of geese, fleeing in terror of the winter that was riding downwind on their trail. The trader staggered to the door of the hut, for one last look toward the vampire land that had claimed Rusty Nolan as its prey. With a hopeless gesture he turned away from the empty landscape. His face was as hard and relentless as that lean wilderness of which he was a part.

His voice cracked like the frozen lash of a dog whip, as he routed out the malamutes and harnessed them to his sled. "It's over after Rusty we're going, lassie," he whispered into Swiftfoot's ear as he gave her the place of honor at the head of his thoroughbred team.

The stinging north wind had covered the wet tundra-moss with a coating of ice; and when the trader turned his back upon Anidar that morning he was ready for the desperate venture friendship had thrust upon him—ready to the last shoestring.

It was not a load of trade goods he carried—but food and ammunition. It was a relief party and a punitive expedition rolled together. At the bottom of the cargo was a light racing sled of whalebone, a contrivance that was intended for flight. That was his one and only concession to possible defeat.

Other men had gone out upon that perilous trail dreaming of inky-skinned sables—and the northern stars kept watch over their unmarked bones. But as Burntwater Bill plodded deeper and deeper into that land of silence, he was planning every detail of the return trip. The fact that there had been no return for the many who had gone that way before, made no difference to him.

Three times in the naked tundra he paused to build a cairn of northern peat to hold provisions for the homeward journey.

At last in the shifting gray of an arctic twilight, Burntwater Bill caught a glimpse of stunted willow thickets on the skyline ahead. For an hour he had been dragging his weary body along behind the sled. Every muscle ached from the hard miles he had tramped since leaving his last camp. But now he called sharply to the dogs, and they swept through the gloom in a new burst of speed, and into the welcome shelter of a thicket.

Soon a fire of willow twigs was leaping in the mushy gloom of the northern night. By the time it had reduced itself to embers Burntwater had built his last cache. There he left the whalebone sled, extra harnesses, food and weapons.

After a short rest he set out upon the last lap of his journey. Just ahead he could see the ragged peaks of the barrier mountains, like a mouthful of broken teeth thrust up against the flickering stars. Before him lay the unmapped miles, a threat unspoken; something that words could not express.

Burntwater set his course by the stars. For that flat land was traced by nothing more reliable than wolf trails that shifted

and faded in the dead gray gloom. Here and there a patch of stunted willows rose up out of the murk. The north wind began its eerie fretting across the frozen marshes like the souls of men who still searched for the homeward trail.

The short winter day came and went, and its last light was fading into the empty dark, when Burntwater Bill stumbled into a beaten trail and knew that his journey was almost at an end. As he plodded on, the trader's sharp eyes caught the glint of starlight reflected from some white object in the moss beside the trail. He stumbled forward, and his hands reached out in stubborn quest. Then he reeled backward, his lean fingers clutching at a human skull.

"A white man," he groaned. "Someone who died on the trail—with his face toward Anidar."

As he pressed deeper into the unknown, other white objects leered at him from the trailside, mocking him with their sinister, sightless eyes.

Then the empty sweep of the winter night was broken by a pin-point of firelight flickering in the gloom ahead.

Swiftfoot sounded her challenge to the lonely silences. The accumulated grief of a million years throbbed in that morbid call. It was answered by other voices out of the darkness ahead, far, yapping voices that might have been mistaken for echoes, but for their discord.

The weary traveler caught the welcome smell of turf smoke in the wind. The yap of mongrel dogs grew louder as Burntwater Bill swung his team around a corner of the hill, and swept down into a sheltered valley that blinked with the red eyes of peat fires, flickering under a gauzy film of smoke.

The wind freshened, raising its fretting lament among the frozen willows. Burntwater pumped a cartridge into the barrel of his rifle as he rode down toward the camp.

Voices called a welcome out of the darkness. The man upon the sled started at the sound. The crouching battle-poise fell from him, and he slipped the rifle into its place upon the load.

It was the ancient tongue of the Korik Tribes, such as the old men of Anidar sometimes used when the muddy moss-wine had carried their thoughts back to the scenes of their childhood.

Those gray headed granddads were a power in Anidar. Much of the fur trade hung upon their beck and nod. Burntwater Bill had spent many months in mastering that almost forgotten tongue. He never had regretted it however, for it had put him in touch with the inner soul of that strange tribe, reeking with the lore and logic of a forgotten age.

With no oaths whispered, and no promises made, he found himself welcome among a brotherhood that was almost a free-masonry of tundraland.

Now he flung back their answering hail—a word that marked him a brother. With renewed confidence he pushed on. No doubt here in the fastness of the unmapped hills he would find the higher degrees of that brotherhood of which he had learned the primary truths in the smoky reek of a native hut, down there by the Anidar. But his search would not end here. It must be that there was some savage tribe farther inland, that had proved Rusty Noland's undoing.

A multitude of mongrel dogs swarmed out to meet him. There was no challenge in their throats, just the whimper of animals that expect food.

Behind them straggled the people who spoke the ancient dialect. The trader saw at a glance that they were also of the Stunted Tribes. But these hairy faced dwarfs picked their way among the crowding dogs, without even ruffling a hair upon the back of a mangy cur.

Burntwater Bill met them with open arms—as he would have met any men, white, black or yellow, who loved dogs. The stunted tribesmen formed a guard of honor about him, and together they went down to the peat fires.

A white haired grandfather of the midgets tottered out to meet them. The old man placed a caressing hand upon the slick coat of one of the malamutes. Burntwater lifted his voice in warning, for it was Gray Face, the lead-dog whose place

had been taken by Swiftfoot. His temper had been getting worse every day since they had left the fur coast. But the words came too late. The animal slashed at the withered hand and leaped snarling away.

Burntwater reached for his rifle. He had seen a hundred dead men stretched out beneath the northern stars, all because of a little trouble over dogs.

The old patriarch lifted his mangled talon to the firelight, and the red blood gushed out over his fur garments.

It was the signal for the battle to begin.

But no roar of rage answered him. With the drawn face of a religious fanatic he pressed his lips to the lacerated flesh, and returned to his hut.

The midgets swarmed out of the shadows. "The Chief waits for the brother who came across the big snows," one of them whispered as they led the way to one of the huts.

Burntwater found the chief to be a man of middle-age, and rather larger than the average run of the stunted tribesmen. The room was littered with cooked food. A bowl filled with reindeer stew was steaming at his elbow.

"The wild goose comes up from the south, and the tribe gives a feast, that the birds may not forget to return to their nesting-grounds," the royal epicure mumbled as he dipped into the stew. "Now a stranger comes across the big snows with the word of brotherhood upon his lips. To-morrow a feast will be spread and the sacred dogs of death will renew their covenant with the chosen people."

As Burntwater Bill turned away he noticed an emblem swinging from the thick neck of the chief. Lover of dogs that he was, it gave him a turn. It was a hound carved from red rock, resembling jade in its texture. Later he noticed others of the tribe with that same scarlet emblem swinging at their hairy throats.

The trader had lived among all manner of heathen tribes, and had seen them bow down before their strange gods. He had tolerated the idols they worshipped, beasts, birds and fishes—even reptiles there had been in that religious zoo—but never had there been a dog.

Burntwater sat beside the turf fire, pondering these things in his mind. Something sniffed at his sleeve. He looked up—and horror clutched him with its icy hands.

There beside him stood Pirate, the big wolf-hound that had led Rusty Nolan's team of mongrels into the wilderness. The animal's hairy lips were parted in a leering grin of recognition.

It was here then among these peaceful midgets that his friend had met his fate.

He scanned the rabble of dogs that roved about the fires. Other familiar animals flitted into the light, and were gone again upon their endless quest of bones.

Mongrels they had been one and all. Here they were gathered in this canine paradise, where even a slash from their cowardly fangs was considered an honor.

Burntwater Bill swore under his breath, vowing to put an end to the threat that had hung over the trading settlements of Anidar. He realized, however, that they had made it difficult for him to use force. The hairy faced midgets had called him brother, and were going to spread a feast in his honor in the morning. Their kind toleration of the dogs touched him in a soft spot, yet the other traders had vanished and their mongrel teams remained. Would he, too, become one of the missing, and the next adventurer find his string of blooded malamutes growing fat and degenerate in the camp of the Stunted Tribes?

A dozen sub-chiefs pressed him with invitations to spend the night in their huts. But the trader preferred his sleeping-bag, with nothing but the thin blue haze of peat smoke between him and the frosty stars. Time and again he awoke, shaken by troublesome dreams. At last the dragging hours brought the first faint flush of the dawn—and the feast.

The turf fires flared up among the shadows, and the native women came shuffling out of the huts, loaded with food. Bowls of sun-baked clay were filled with reindeer stew; and the rock tables were heaped with little cakes made from the wild rice that grew among the flooded marshes.

Jugs of muddy moss-wine passed two and fro. Young and old shared alike in the feast.

The last stars began to fade before the slow encroachment of the dawn. The natives lingered over their wine-mugs and cast impatient glances at the brightening sky. They were waiting for something to happen. The trader himself began to grow uneasy under the strain.

At last the sunless daylight had reached its full measure of languid gray above the naked fangs of the unmapped mountains. Then from far up the valley a rawhide drum sounded its lifeless thud. It was answered by another from the edge of the village.

There was the clatter of a hundred wine-mugs set down as one. The feasting tribesmen stiffened themselves beside the tables. A breath of expectancy rushed into their nostrils, like a whistling, snoring chorus. Then all was still.

The patter of feet sounded among the huts of the encampment, and a native runner dashed past, and out upon the flat country that stretched away to the south.

Burntwater sat up staring. A trained sprinter never would have wasted that burst of speed at the beginning of a race. Yet surely this was no amateur affair that had frozen the half-drunken natives into staring statues beside the feast tables.

On the runner swept, and was lost in the bleak, frozen marshes that stretched their lean miles toward the Anidar coast.

"Where's the other runner?" the trader nudged the nearest native.

The dwarf turned his eyes away from the spot where the fleet-footed tribesman had disappeared and moved his head in a sweeping gesture that indicated the upper reaches of the valley.

Burntwater Bill looked—and an angry curse blurted upon his lips.

Ten monstrous red hounds came lumbering along on the man's trail. Not with a burst of speed such as the native had indulged in, but with a lazy confidence, as though they had run that race of death before and knew the spot where they would find a spent runner floundering among the marshes.

So this was the covenant of the sacred red dogs! This had been the fate of the traders who had travelled that road before him. With a sickening horror the trader realized that he, too had become one of that band of missing adventurers, whose homing song no longer broke the brooding silence of the Siberian tundras.

Burntwater Bill staggered to his feet. Every muscle in his lean body was trembling with a lust to kill. His deep-set eyes measured the distance of the lumbering hounds as he dragged his heavy belt-gun from its holster.

But the midgets rushed at him like an army of ants, and dragged him down into his seat. The death hounds lumbered on around a shoulder of the hill. As they passed out of sight they filled that bleak, sunless world with their gruesome challenge. It was the voice of a four-footed Cain, gloating over his depravity.

Burntwater Bill sank weakly into his seat. A lover of dogs he always had been until that moment, but he had seen enough of dog worship to last him for the rest of his life. His very soul flamed with a hatred for the mangy curs that swarmed about the feasting grounds.

One of the animals came crowding between the trader's legs, searching for bones. For a moment the white brother towered above the black faced dwarfs, a squirming dog in his lifted hand. Then he let the animal drop—and kicked as he did in gridiron days. His foot landed with a thud in the belly of the falling cur. It shot out over the heads of the tribesmen and landed among the tables.

With a bellow of fury the stunted clan surged over the man who had come across the big snows—the traitor who had come with the word of brotherhood upon his lips and had broken the faith by kicking a dog.

His flailing blows crumbled a score of runts upon the trampled moss, but a hundred more sprang to take their places. Like leeches they clung to his body, and dragged him down. A moment later Burntwater Bill lay trussed among the wrecked feast tables.

Like a flock of ants dragging a beetle,

the tribesmen moved their prisoner to a cave in the side of the hill. Without a word they thrust him in, and rolled a heavy boulder across the opening.

In the cold silence of his rock cell, the trader lay thinking of the terrible scene he had witnessed, and wondering if he, too, would be turned out before the hounds.

Darkness settled over that land of lonely silences—and with it came Swiftfoot. For an hour she mourned beside the barrier rock. Then Burntwater sent her away with a curse. How he hated dogs!

After hours of mental agony, broken by minutes of troubled sleep, the trader saw the daylight begin to filter in around the barrier rock. He heard the sound of feet climbing the hill. The boulder grated against the solid wall, as a multitude of hands heaved at its polished sides, and the next moment Burntwater Bill was dragged out into the frosty silence of the morning.

A flurry of snow had fallen in the night, and the gale had whipped it into drifts as far as the eye could see.

There was a sinister note in the wind as it whined among the lean hills. Not a word was spoken. A tribesman slashed the cords from his limbs, and rubbed the circulation back into his numbed muscles. Then they shoved him down the hill ahead of them.

Back of the village they paused. The black faced runts squinted anxiously toward the southeast, where the laggard winter dawn was growing brighter in the frosty skies.

Then the dull thud of the death drum sounded at the head of the valley. Like an echo another dull, dead note boomed out from the village. Eager hands thrust Bill out among the snowdrifts, his face turned toward the distant shores of Anidar—and death following upon his trail.

The trader turned and flung back a mocking laugh at them. The dwarfs did not know that he was the owner of the fastest dog team in the north. In that land where every man runs behind his sled, the pace of dogs becomes the pace of man. As he sprang away across the frozen marshes, Burntwater felt confident that he would lead the red butchers farther afield than ever they had been forced to go to find their prey.

Not in silent desperation did he fly, as the native had the day before. In the fur trade the prize skins always fell to the swiftest runner. Taking slim chances had come to be second nature to him. Now this was to be his last race—the last opportunity he would have to show them what sort of stuff Bill Duncan was made of. He ran as though under the admiring eyes of the grandstand.

As he swung over the shoulder of the hill he paused for one backward glance, waved his hand in a gesture of contempt, and trotted down the ridge and out of sight.

As soon as he was hidden from the village Burntwater Bill sprang into the trail-gait that had been acquired behind the swiftest string of malamutes on the Siberian coast.

In some strange way it was not of death that he thought, but of the race. His last battle would be fought far beyond that of the swiftest runner who had gone down that trail. He was fully determined upon that one point.

The miles reeled by, and the bellow of the pack did not draw noticeably closer. Perhaps the red hounds thought there was no need for haste, but he would show them. Hope of ultimate success began to return to him. His mind went racing across the frozen fens, to a clump of stunted willows where his spare outfit was hidden. With a rifle in his hands he would give them an unexpected welcome, one that would last them for all time. Then he would return for his team—and settle with the dwarfs for the murder of Rusty Nolan.

But his speculation was broken by the mournful song of the hounds, drawing closer across the snow. Hope flickered out once more, and only the race remained.

His would be a story that would be whispered around the peat fires of the stunted clans, until it took its place among the legends of that bleak land.

Burntwater Bill was reeling with exhaustion as he swept down the beaten trail, past the spot where the swiftest

runner had fallen, and on across the rolling tundras where the purple haze of night already was beginning to gather. He topped a long slope and turned back for one look behind. His breath was coming in whistling gasps, and his lungs seemed filled with liquid fire.

There at the foot of the hill the death hounds followed swift and sure upon his track. Beyond them was another blotch that reeled drunkenly among the shadows.

At first Burntwater thought it was the chief, coming to witness the kill. Then he saw it was another pack of dogs. He thrilled at the sight. Even the dull-witted dwarfs had noticed his speed and sent a pack of swifter animals to reinforce the hounds.

Burntwater Bill filled his lungs with the frosty air and reeled away into the gathering night. As he ran he could hear the footfalls of the pack and the snap of their cruel jaws. It was only a matter of minutes before they would be upon him.

At last he stumbled and fell. He scrambled to his feet but made no further attempt to run. This was the end of the trail for him. With straining muscles he turned to meet his fate.

In that moment the two blotches that raced toward him were blended into one—a writhing, bellowing mass, cursed with the death shrieks of the wild.

To Burntwater Bill that call seemed to be a part of the life he had known at Anidar—the mad scramble for gold that was slipping away from him forever. Then his own battle-cry sounded full and strong across the white miles of the snow plain, a rallying call that held nothing of fear. For among the lumbering forms of the death hounds he recognized the lean, lithe shapes of his own malamutes.

With an easy, graceful swiftness they darted among the dogs of death. With measured exactness their sharp fangs slashed at jugular vein and ham string. One moment the skirts of the northern night was cursed with the medley of battle. The next, a thin half-circle of motionless dogs lifted their noses to the sky and sobbed out the wailing measures of the death-lament.

There, too, was Swiftfoot, the dog he had cursed and sent away. But how was she to know that Burntwater Bill hated all dogs now? With a whimper of gladness she bounded toward him, and his lean arms closed about her.

Then the trader reeled back in the grip of a new madness, a piece of paper clutched in his trembling fingers.

It was a message that had been fastened to the dog's neck, now soaked with blood from the battle. Frantically he searched for a match among his clothing, struck it, and held the paper in the light of the flame.

"God didn't intend Rusty Nolan for dog-food," the trader whispered as he caught sight of the familiar writing.

"Dear Bill—

Don't touch a dog—for the love of your life. They kill men here for that. I did—but my red hair saved me. They turned me into a priest—high custodian to a red-dog idol. I'm in a cave on the west side of the mountain—Swiftfoot knows where.

I planned to get away all summer—but you can't do much when its always daylight. Then Swiftfoot showed up last night, and I knew you'd come to find me.

They bring furs to sacrifice to the idol. I've hid out the best of them to take back to Anidar. Wait till they send out the hounds. Then sneak away and come. But be careful, for the law prohibits anybody from leaving the village for twenty-four hours after the race of the sacrifice.

The coast will be clear then—only two old priests with me—and I'll take care of them.

Rusty."

"We've got till daylight to-morrow morning to get the outfit and make it back to the Temple," Burntwater Bill gulped as he patted the lead-dog's head and turned his face once more to the south.

"We'll make it like a walk-away, you blooded little aristocrats of tundraland," he called back to the following malamutes. "But I'll have to break an old rule, and ride on the sled part of the way—for I was doing *my bit* in the running line, if you noticed."

ECLAIRS AND GINGER SNAPS

By ANNA BROWNELL DUNAWAY

This story casts no reflections on the eclair. It merely hints that to the healthy, hungry man, a home-made ginger snap and a plebeian pork chop now and then are not amiss.

I BELIEVE that it is quite possible to live up to a name just as it is possible to live up to the refining influence of a tablecloth. At least, there is no doubt in my mind but that Daphne Sinclair tried to live up to hers. Westerville is rather old-fashioned, and Sarahs and Janes and Susans predominate. As a consequence, Daphne reveled in her poetic appellation even though it became twisted at times into "Daffeny," and shortened into "Daffy" by such coarse and misunderstanding souls as comprised the common herd.

When Daphne married Horace Butts, it was certainly a triumph of love over poetic traditions. Certain it is, there were never two people more opposite in taste and environment: Horace, round-faced, practical, democratic, and Daphne, dainty, aesthetic, visionary.

When, at the expiration of the usual time, the young couple were at home to their friends, Westerville people were frankly shocked at what they termed Daphne's outlandish taste in her house furnishings. I'll admit that they were bizarre enough. They reminded the uninitiated of a Chinese junk shop. The old-fashioned whatnot with its glass jar of candy hearts had nothing on Daphne's glass cabinets filled with pagodas, chimes, Billikins and all sorts of grinning images.

"What do you think!" observed Daphne to me one day soon after their marriage. "Horace, poor, benighted boy that he is, wanted the living room walls decorated with enlarged pictures of the Butts departed forebears! But what can you expect from one raised in his environment? You know Mother Butts still keeps an atrocious red plush album on her center table, and clings to sky-blue drapes and tidies and pillow shams worked in turkey-red cotton!"

I looked at the walls narrowly. There were many good paintings and etchings, it is true, but somehow the whole interior breathed coldness and superficiality. I may not be artistic, but I must admit that a good, wholesome, enlarged forebear with paternal chin whiskers would look as good to me on a cold, frosty morning, as an airy September Morn. And when you add to that, nude Psyches and icy, marble Venuses, the general effect is enough to give one the shivers.

If only Daphne's aestheticism had stopped there; but it didn't and thereby hangs this tale. It extended to her housekeeping and her table. I firmly believe Horace was half famished. Her cook book was a dainty, white leather affair called, "Catering For Two." Her orders at the grocer's startled the veteran proprietors out of their cut-and-dried complacency.

"That there Daffeny Butts," Si Pullen, Westerville's pioneer grocer, was wont to complain, "is always askin' for some onheard of thing like 'sturtium seeds and papariki and tobasco sauce. She's what I call daffy."

But with it all, she was the most alluring creature. Her taste in dress ran to Grecian effects—long, trailing draperies and classic outlines. After Mother Butts with her short, serviceable gingham gowns, patched and faded, she must have been a revelation to Horace, who playfully dubbed her, after sundry entanglements in said draperies, "The Duchess of Draggletail."

Henry, after the manner of husbands generally, never tired of expatiating on her

blonde hair, her pensive gray eyes and her exquisite coloring. He fairly raved over the dull blues she wore until it rubbed not a little on my wifely sensibilities. However, one evening, after we had accepted a dinner invitation there, I noticed that his enthusiasm waned. Upon our return, he poked about in the pantry seeking what he might devour and, over a half section of mince pie, volunteered the following cryptic utterance:

"Poor Butts! No wonder he looks like a bundle of slats!"

"Still," I murmured magnanimously—did you ever notice that wives are always generous in moments like this?—"Daphne's endive salad was a dream."

"I'd call it a nightmare," snorted Henry. "And as for the piece de resistance, it was fairly dripping in its gore."

"It was a trifle under-done," I remarked judicially. "Sometimes things are when one doesn't understand a fireless cooker."

"Give me a piece of dog," said Henry dramatically, "anything—just so it isn't cooked in the fireless!"

"At least," I contended, "you can't deny that their home is beautifully kept."

"Ugh-huh," grunted Henry, slicing off another trianglar section.

And it was. Its shining order was such that Mother Butts was heard to remark one day, apropos of its rigorous aspect, "It'd seem good to see a fly." Our old minister probably had the same thought in mind when he said that he liked to go into a home that was just a little disorderly. It looked as though people really lived in it. As for Daphne, every book and paper had to be exactly plumb. She frankly confessed to me that she didn't care in the least for babies. She didn't want heel-marks on her furniture nor cooky crumbs on her davenport.

"Horace never thinks of tracking my floors," she boasted to me one day. "I don't ask him to take off his shoes, but he always says, 'Daphne, bring me my slippers.' "

"Poor Horace," I remarked involuntarily.

Daphne arched her beautifully penciled eyebrows.

"Oh, of course," said she, "I know what you are thinking of—that it is very different from his early training. I know Mother Butts boasts that as a child, he never went around a mud hole. And Aunt Julia never tires of telling how she hated to see him coming—he was so dreadful. Why, once he raked out ashes all over her clean floor, newly scrubbed. But it doesn't follow that he has to be a boor now. I am sure he appreciates our artistic home—why shouldn't he?"

"Daphne," I said, with the frankness of old friendship, "I am afraid you don't know men as I do. They care more for comfort than for artistic effects. In some ways a man is still an aborigine. He'd rather be dirty and comfortable than to be clean and miserable. What a man wants is a home—just plain home with a chicken in the pot and a woman beside the hearth stirring it. Beside that ideal domestic bliss, beauty and brains pale into insignificance."

Daphne's Grecian nose tilted scornfully. "Then it is time he became a civilized human being," said she. "Do you mean by that that a man ought to trail a brace of dripping ducks up a polished stairway and throw himself on a Marseilles spread, hunting togs and all?"

"I'd like to see Henry try it," I observed calmly, "but we can make a few concessions to their savage inclinations. Take that davenport there with its silk cushions. Does Horace ever stretch out on it comfortably?"

"Certainly not," said Daphne. "The very idea!"

I sat silent, thinking of Mother Butts' old couch covered with a Roman stripe cover—of the tousled, worse-for-wear cushions—of the faded lampshade improvised from an old green petticoat. Daphne's cut glass electrolier threw out a coldly-prismatic glare. To a boy brought up as Horace had been how different it must seem, how cold—"

"Why should he throw himself on the best davenport?" broke in Daphne petulantly, "and rumple up my embroidered cushions? Mother never picked up after father and the boys—why should I baby Horace?"

Again I was silent—this time discreetly

so. It was common history in Westerville how the boys had turned out. Very early they had left their gilded environment for the primrose path. I conquered an impulse to evade the issue, and spoke firmly.

"Daphne, you may carry your ideas too far. I have been married thirteen years and I have seen many homes broken up. Men are men. If they are susceptible, they are also omniverous. They must be comfortable, they must be fed. On these two facts hang all the law and the prophets in regard to married life. What would you say if Horace should wander from his fireside?"

"Why, how perfectly absurd!" laughed Daphne. "I'd like to see anybody that could take Horace away from me."

But I wasn't so sure, particularly as I chanced to pass a cafe on my way home and saw Horace with his legs wrapped around a stool fairly devouring a hamburger sandwich. And, considering everything, I wasn't surprised when Daphne came over one raw, gloomy day with her face quite tragic. Something had shaken her out of her exquisite calm and the effect was rather becoming than otherwise, giving her less of the look of a statue and more of a human being.

"Auntie Miller," she gasped unbelievingly, "what do you think? I saw Horace in a cafe down town eating a great slab of pumpkin pie!"

"Many a man before Horace," I observed calmly, "has eaten pumpkin pie and lived to tell the tale."

"But think of it!" she cried. "Think of Horace perched up on a stool like any section hand! And pie of all things! Why, for luncheon we had chocolate eclairs. I just tax my brain thinking up nice desserts for Horace and here he goes and eats a greasy bakery pie! Auntie Miller, what would you do about it?"

"Do?" I echoed. "Why, if he seems so fond of pie I'd feed him pie. A man gets tired of flossy knickknacks. Make one for dinner to-night—"

"I have my dinner planned," she interrupted coldly. "Sweetbreads and mushrooms, asparagus tips and heavenly hash with lady fingers."

I groaned inwardly. Mother Butts' standby, I happened to know, was a sort of boiled dumpling, familiarly known as "pigs."

Daphne leaned forward, struck by a sudden idea.

"Do you suppose that Horace has ever done that before? He—he doesn't seem to be a bit hungry lately. Just minces."

"He most certainly has," I answered shortly. "I have seen him and so has Henry. Daphne, be warned in time. You will have to give in a little and feed the prodigal son on husks instead of French pastries."

"As if a grown man should be treated like a baby," pouted Daphne. "Why shouldn't he change his ideas to suit mine?"

"Why not indeed?" I echoed. "Daphne, you have touched on the unsolved riddle of the ages. I give it up and so must you. Be satisfied with crumbs that fall from the master's table."

She wrapped a silken scarf about her and the picture she made in her sables, the rose-hued scarf framing her delicate face, was enough to set more than one masculine heart beating. Yet, as I gazed at her retreating figure, I felt that almost any old siren could gain a foothold in that Eden. These wives who fancy they are so secure in their husbands' affections, little realize that their kingdom may be jeopardized by even so humble an ally as a ginger snap. I say it regretfully, but "pity 'tis, 'tis true."

It was a week or so later that I answered the telephone in response to a ring, to find Daphne on the line. Her voice was dull, expressionless, so much so that I hardly recognized it.

"Auntie Miller," she begged, "won't you come over? I—I must see you." The voice ended in a little choke.

It was a blustering, disagreeable day. I had a pot of soup simmering on the range. There are, no doubt, more aesthetic odors in the world than onions, but I assure you Henry is far more susceptible to the smell of vegetable soup on a wintry day, than he would be to attar of roses. Take the comment for what it is worth. I believe there are times when we all go back to the primitive, just as a pedigreed angora

cat with generations of blue blood behind her, will snatch at a bone like any starved, ally cat. So much for our glossed over sensibilities.

I found Daphne in a clinging gown of black and silver, looking like a goddess among her Lares and Penates. In her well-appointed home, I noticed no odor of onions. There was never any spicy smell of cookies there, or the pungent aroma of freshly-baked bread. Such homely incense as this was hidden by the clever expedients of orris root and orange peel burnt on coals, and by innumerable incense candles. Coming as I did into this exquisite atmosphere, the effect was indescribable—repellent; not unlike what might be vulgarly termed a slap in the face.

"Well?" I greeted her inquiringly.

"Auntie Miller," began Daphne tragically, "I don't know how to tell you, but I must. If I keep it to myself any longer I'll go crazy. There is something wrong. I never know whether Horace is coming to dinner or not. For three nights now he has 'phoned that he was detained on business and for me not to wait dinner."

"Well, what of it?" I replied. "Men are in the habit of doing that. It is their well-known prerogative."

"But where do you suppose he takes dinner?" she asked in a sepulchral tone.

"Possibly in a cafe," I said drily. "Maybe even at Mother Butts'. You know how men feel about mothers' cooking."

"No—not that," cried Daphne. "Horace would not do that. Whatever he finds lacking in me, he would not give it away to his mother. He is too loyal. These three nights when I've dined alone, I've been thinking of what you said about—about pies and things. Yet Horace never complained. He is so good—so noble always—just like a great, generous overgrown boy. Perhaps I should have tried to please him more."

"No doubt," I returned tartly. "But why the past tense? Has he eloped?"

"Not yet," cried Daphne sobbingly, "but—but"—she struggled with her composure and went on tensely—"people are talking about him and the girl that—that runs the Sugar Bowl!"

I laughed outright. The lady manager of the little confectionery known as the Sugar Bowl was anything but a siren. On the contrary, she was short and fat with red hair, freckles and gooseberry eyes.

"A Salome—a Cleopatra!" I exclaimed in mock tragic accents. "Why, Daphne, she'll never see thirty again; and homely—she'd stop a clock!"

"Nevertheless," said Daphne evenly, "he hangs around there all the time. More than one neighbor has kindly enlightened me. She must have some kind of charm. You know even these homely women have a way with them. Several of them have made history. I know this Sugar Bowl woman has got around Horace some way just like all these old vampires." She broke down and wept piteously.

"Then," said I decidedly, "the only thing to do is to fight her with her own weapons. Why not stake all in a fair fight?" I thought I knew what the charm was. The case wasn't so deep as to require a surgical operation for even my intellect to see through it.

Daphne sat up suddenly.

"Come," she cried excitedly. "Let's go down to the Sugar Bowl and get a cup of chocolate. We can wrap up in long coats and veils and take a table where we can watch unobserved. I can't bear this suspense—I must see for myself what it is that attracts Horace."

"H'm," I demurred, "but what about Henry? It is close to dinner time. He dislikes to come home and find me gone. Some other time—"

"Now—now," she cried almost wildly. "It won't take us more than half an hour! Henry may be late anyway and if not he surely can amuse himself a few minutes. Oh, Auntie Miller, if I were only as sure of Horace as you are of Henry!"

That little choking cry won the day. We disguised ourselves in long motor coats and soft crush hats, and set forth on the great adventure. After a short walk we reached the Sugar Bowl. It was a very unpretentious little place with a counter and two or three tables. Originally a confectionery only, the present incumbent had enlarged the business to the extent

of serving hot chocolate and rolls. We took a far table, received our steaming chocolate and looked about us.

Through a partly drawn curtain, I perceived a back room in which the siren evidently lived. From this room drifted voices, one a man's, low-pitched, vibrant. Daphne clutched my hand convulsively under the table. The voice was undoubtedly Horace's. A few customers drifted in and Miss Pell served them briskly, then retreated to the room behind the curtain.

I confess to my full share of curiosity and, after one of these excursions, I took advantage of the parted curtain and peered into the back room. What I saw was a jumbled impression of a table with a checkered cloth, a huge cat on a cushion, flower pots blooming on a window sill, a dilapidated lounge with worn cushions, a glowing little monkey stove, a skillet hissing. Then the curtain fell.

I leaned forward nonchalantly as Miss Pell bustled forward and gave us our checks. In the doorway she stood for a moment, giving us a casual glance. Again the curtain parted. I strained my gaze. In a big arm chair I saw Horace Butts leaning forward and watching the skillet with a fascinated gaze.

"Now I'll dish it up," came distinctly from the other side of the curtain, followed by a throaty laugh. "Nobody in now but a couple of nuts gone to sleep over their chocolate."

"Liver and bacon." Again the throaty laugh. "I've a mind to brown an onion for gravy if you can stand for the smell—"

"Can I?"—the tones were eager—"Well, just try me."

"My creed," went on Miss Pell cheerily, "is just lendin' a hand. Get out from under my feet, Neb, you triflin', good-for-nothing old sinner, you. What say to a few biscuits, Boy?"—a low mumble—"Well they are to say tasty-like on a cold night like this. I recollect the first I ever made was hard enough to knock down a yearlin'." Her rich laugh boomed out above the clatter of baking things. "Just pull back that skillet will you, Boy, whilst I mix up the dough. As I was sayin', good fellowship's my creed. 'Feast and the world feasts with you. Fast and you fast alone.' I read that onct. It's true, too. Now, mebbe if I was alone, I'd just a-brewed me a cup of tea and et a roll, but havin' you drop in so comfy-like"—another low murmur—"yes, yes, I understand—a fine cook but nothin' but knick-knacks and them not to say fillin'. Yes, I'd like right well to meet her. How about a ginger snap or two—I made a fresh batch. Just like your ma used to make? Well now, that's nice."

"We ought to go," whispered Daphne.

"She's forgotten us," I said softly. "Let's see it through. Did you ever smell anything so delicious as those ginger snaps?"

The aroma of coffee filled the air. There was the sound of chairs dragging across the floor.

"Come to grub, old Beeswax," invited the cheery voice. "Guess the biscuits are done now. Just retch and help yourself."

Daphne arose stumblingly, but Horace's voice, louder now as if more confident, arrested us.

"Gee, but this is home-like. I only wish —you see,"—apologetically—"she is like a bit of Dresden china, fragile—delicate, and she likes fine, dainty things around her. Anything like onions now, why, she thinks they're plebeian. I'm a cad to be telling you this, Miss Pell, but—I feel somehow that I'm losing my grip. Those grinning idols and that infernal Billikins leer at me in my sleep. For two bits I'd smash the whole blooming outfit and prop my feet on the table—"

Again the low, rumbling laugh. Boldly I stared through the parted curtain and saw Miss Pell's face above the little squat coffee pot. It was freckled, yes, and the eyes were undoubtedly green, and the hair a flaming red; yet, in spite of these defects, Miss Pell was good to look at; and, looking at her now, I trembled for Daphne. Clearly her charm lay in the kindly humor of the eyes, in the mobile mouth with its ever-ready smile.

"Honest confession," rumbled Miss Pell, "is good for the soul. I knowed it was something like that. You can't fool your Aunt Marg. But Boy, say, why not put it up to her gentle-like? Why not tell her

just like you're tellin' me? You're just two young things and you have lots to learn. But listen, Boy. You can't help things by driftin' away. Many a man afore you has did it to his sorrow. The first year's the hardest, and it takes two little bears to keep the machinery runnin' smooth. Their names is Bear and Forbear—"

"Let us go," murmured Daphne brokenly. "What a fool I am—what a fool! Why, she isn't a vampire at all—just a dear, kindly, motherly soul. And what she has taught me—unlearned as she is!"

"Sometimes," I remarked gently, "the untutored are the best teachers."

We laid down the money for our lunch and went out softly. Daphne cried all the way home with little penitent sobs that went to my heart. My own ideas concerning sirens had received a jolt. It is something to have cause to believe in your sex.

As I expected, I found Henry having an altercation with Central concerning my non-appearance, and his remarks, if set down here, would have to be expurgated. However, by the time we had reached the dessert he had become fairly docile, and I related the whole adventure.

"Good work," he commented. "Guess I'll have to drop in at the Sugar Bowl and take a slant at this green-eyed monster. The only siren that can get her clutches on yours truly is a cook. The art of cooking has got beauty and brains skinned to a fare-you-well. That's why I married you, Nell," he concluded, with his usual diplomacy.

I accepted this rather doubtful tribute modestly and fell to wondering about the outcome of this little domestic drama. Ah, the flight of time! I can't realize that it is quite three years since these stirring events happened. And what of Horace and Daphne?

I never knew just what passed between them on that memorable night when Horace came home to find the living room glowing with cheerful lights and rose-colored shades, with the images and statuettes missing from the cabinet shelves, with books and papers and music scattered about promiscuously, and with Daphne herself in a big, enveloping apron, making taffy, and the house smelling from garret to cellar of burnt molasses.

At any rate, there is nowhere in Westerville, such a dovecote as the Butts' nest, and if the brazen chirpings of the parent birds may be believed, no such a nestling in the entire, civilized world as master Horace Lothair Butts, who, I might say in passing, sprawls at will on the davenport, and munches ginger snaps with impunity.

THE GRAVEN IMAGE, another story in the Henry Series, will appear in the March number. It illustrates Auntie Miller's observation that no man is a hero to his wife any more than he is to his valet, but that occasionally one may find a wife who, while thoroughly disillusioned as to her husband, still preserves an ideal in the person of an old flame.

OPTIONS

By CHARLES MAGEE ADAMS

In which one of the subtle sex saves the day for a pampered son who thinks that dealing in options requires only slightly more effort than playing auction bridge.

S usual, Archie Rollins slid nonchalantly into the private office of the head of the Rollins Engineering Company in bland disregard of the visitor who was engaging his father's attention.

"Yes, Atkinson, your proposition looks pretty good," the elder Rollins was saying. "I know where Parker City is—up in Greer county, right in the timber country." He halted and swung about as Archie cleared his throat. "Well?"

His tone could scarcely be construed as welcome, and his look was unmistakable. But Archie was unperturbed. This was not the first time he had witnessed manifestations of paternal displeasure. "Why, Dad, you said to come in about—"

The languid explanation was cut short. "Yes, at three o'clock," his father snapped. "It's almost four. Get out and wait."

Archie found himself staring a bit dumbfoundedly at a severely tailored back. He sighed. He was due at his club in ten minutes and heaven knew how long this senseless conference about an absurd business proposition at Parker City would go on. But he needed the $200 he had come to ask for, so he slid regretfully across the outer office, dropped to a settee and idly picked up a magazine.

He was just finishing the last paragraphs of a story a half hour later when Sam, the office boy, signalled him that his father would see him. So rising, he reentered the private room. "Sorry I couldn't be just right on time," he remarked, sighing with adequate contrition as he sank into a chair.

His parent's temper had apparently not improved. "What do you call on time?" He thumped the desk. "That's just one more exhibition of yours! Just one more and by thunder it'll be the last."

There followed a monologue made up of exposition, description and narration—an old theme worn threadbare with much harping upon. It recounted the fact that Archie Rollins failed in prep school and college, had done nothing but squander money and time and require more money and time on the part of his father to extricate him from sundry difficulties into which he was alleged to have strayed because he didn't have anything else to do. Archie had heard it before. He had heard it so often that he could almost repeat it in unison with his parent. Always it ended with a set scene, a promise on the part of Archie to do better, and a check from father.

But this time the ritual varied. At the end of the usual phrases a new set of lines was taken up by the elder Rollins. "Now here's the proposition," he bellowed. "By thunder I've fooled with you just about long enough. This is the last time I'm going to listen to your excuses and promises. From now on you've got to make your own way and by thunder, I'll see that you do."

Archie raised his eyebrows. The new lines were not so pleasant as the old.

"Now listen," the elder Rollins plunged on, hammering the mahogany with his fist. "I'm going to give you a check for ten thousand dollars."

Archie fairly gasped. He had intended asking for only $200.

"You can take that and do just whatever you damned please with it."

Archie had difficulty in repressing an eager smile. That new twin-six—

"But don't come around for any more.

When that's gone you can work. Get me? Work! You've fooled around enough. By thunder, you'll work now or starve."

Archie was dumbfounded. His eyes bulged and he sat staring stupidly at the short thin man in the chair before the desk. "Work?"

"That's the word. You spell it w-o-r-k! Here! Don't come around again till you can support yourself." He held out the check.

For perhaps ten seconds Archie sat staring dazedly at the rectangle of lithographed paper. Then with a jerk he sat up, reached out and accepted the perforated slip with punctilious politeness. "Thank you," he said coldly. "I shall repay this loan as soon as possible. Good afternoon."

An hour later he drew up before a house in the suburbs of the city, and stepped out of his long, low speedster with the tread of a Fourth-of-July orator mounting the speaker's stand. By the time he stalked into the drawing room he was the personification of hauteur.

"Why Archie," a girl's gay voice called. "I was just hoping you'd come out for tea and—" The short, fluffy blonde paused in the center of the room with blue eyes rounding in consternation. "Why—what's the matter?"

He sat down, choosing a stiff, straight-backed chair. "Nothing," loftily, "I'm going into business."

She gasped. "But—but you always said you hated it and that your father couldn't make you and—"

He stemmed her tide of protest with a dramatically upraised arm. "Please listen," he requested gravely. "It is true that my father and I have not exactly agreed about business. In fact he has—well rather denied that I can do anything worth considering. I have therefore decided to prove to him that I can make a success of it if I choose."

She leaned close, eyes glowing with admiration. "You have?"

He tried to seem unconcious of the look. "Its really very simple," he explained loftily. "These chaps try to make everybody believe that its quite a trick to put over a big deal as they say, but in reality it's very simple." He produced a magazine, one similar to that which he had read in the office. "This, for example," he proceeded, "is how it was done in one case. Just a story, you know, fiction and all that, but it shows how the trick's done. You can see for yourself."

He handed her the magazine and she scanned the pages eagerly. "The big money's made by what they call options," he discoursed as she read. "You wouldn't understand, but anyhow the idea is to tie up whatever the other fellow's after and then make him pay for it when he wants it. In this story the young chap got options on the railroad from a pulp mill his father had started and made the old boy pay him a big wad to get it. He had to have it, you see, and it made the old chap sit up and take notice. Easy, and quite interesting I suspect. That's why I think I'll try it."

After glancing through to discover the ending before the middle of the story she looked up, her eyes big with delight. "Archie! Oh, Archie! Won't that be just splendid?" She paused with sudden consternation. "But where can you do it?"

"Easy," he assured her patronizingly. "When I was waiting to see dad a man came in and they talked about something they had in view. It's up at Parker City in Greer county. I didn't think anything about it at the time but after I'd read the story and dad—had—had talked to me, I saw that was my big chance. I got a map and looked it up. There's a railroad running down from Parker City to the main line, the only road in the valley. Don't you see? Just like the story. I made some inquiries and the road's owned by some little jerkwater company up in that country. I'll do just what this fellow did in the story. I'll get options on the railroad and then make them pay me for it. They don't know I know. They've been so busy getting things ready for their pulp mill they never thought about anybody getting hold of the railroad."

She beamed her admiration. "Oh, Archie! You're just wonderful!" she whispered. "Won't he be surprised? My, I'll be so proud!" She paused. "But, Archie!" she exclaimed, her face clouding.

"What am I going to do? Here in the story the girl gives the man the idea. You've gone and started without me." She pouted prettily. "Don't you suppose I want to make your father like me, too?"

Archie frowned. "You don't have to bother. Just as soon as I prove I can do this sort of thing he'll give me a good soft job."

She was not convinced. "I want to buy an option or something, too," she insisted, pouting.

Archie patted her hand soothingly. "You won't have to," he persuaded. "I'll take care of my little girl. Don't you worry about that."

"I want to go, too," she persisted. "I want to see you beat him and I'm going!"

And she did.

As is to be expected from towns thus named, Parker City fell considerably short of being the metropolis its name connoted. In fact had not his air of cool dignity persisted, Archie Rollins would surely have been bored to disappointment as he arrived in its midst two mornings later, with the eager Betty Barrington and her stately maiden aunt, Miss Martha Barrington. But as things transpired, he alighted from the passenger end of the single combination car, which composed the freight, express, mail, baggage and passenger rolling stock of the Parker City Air Line, and stalked across the teetering station platform and down the single street which meandered along the rushing river between the two rows of buildings that made up the town's real estate improvement. With due care for his glistening brown shoes he picked his way down this thoroughfare and headed for the Parker City hotel, a dejected structure which he entered frowningly.

"Isn't this just romantic!" Betty exclaimed rapturously, as she caught sight of its dilapidated interior.

Archie had some caustic remark about its patent discomfort on the tip of his tongue, but he decided the part of the hardened stoic was better. "Not swell, but a fellow's got to put up with what he can find in a business proposition."

"I just love it," Betty flowed on. "It's so quaint and different."

But Archie did not waste time in admiration of his new environment. Without haste and yet with sufficient speed to seem purposeful he sallied forth and sought out the stockholders of the Parker City Air Line Company. They were not difficult to find. Practically everyone in the village had been guilty of the indiscretion of buying some of the shares at the road's beginning, and where all had been equally indiscreet none refused to admit error. In quick succession Mr. Jake Goodings, the proprietor of the single business establishment of the city, Mr. Silas Longtree, the man about town who spent his days within or before the Goodings establishment, Reverend Simpson, and Mr. Ezra Corning, the editor of the Parker City Eagle, seized upon the amazing offer of real money for the right to purchase their stock in the Parker City Air Line Company.

Back at the hotel that night Archie counted his day's results, sixty shares of stock at a total cost of $120. He permitted himself the satisfaction of a smile.

"You're just wonderful!" Betty cried. "Just wonderful!" Her face clouded. "But isn't there something I can do? That's what I came up here for. You remember the girl in the story."

Archie nodded tolerantly. "No use for you to do a thing," he declared. "I'll be through here in less time than it takes to tell about it. Then we can just wait till dad tries to start something."

For the next week he spent his time in and about the village seeing the various stockholders of the railroad company, meeting all with his sober, strained business air, and leaving the surprised victims of his encounters with money in return for filled-in option blanks. His success elated him. But Betty continued uneasy despite his increasingly buoyant spirits. "You're sure you don't need me?" she protested one evening as he recounted a particularly brilliant day's work.

"Business is a cinch," he replied loftily. "These fools just fall for my proposition like fish for bait. Just wait till dad has to have this road."

She pouted. "But—but I wanted to help you."

Even the next afternoon, when he came in, glowing in open triumph with the total 100% of the options, she was still moping about disappointedly.

"I've got him," he boasted, forgetting his business role for the moment. "I'll make him pay. Options just cost me two thousand and I'll make him pay a hundred thousand."

She sighed. "But I—I wanted to help," she quavered.

He did not heed her. "And say," he plunged on, his face lighting with new inspiration. "I just happened to think! He hasn't bought a factory site yet."

Before she could ask a question he was across the hotel porch and striding down the street, his dignified business air once more in place. Three hours later when he strode in fairly bursting with triumph she was still drooping in her chair. "Got all the good sites cornered," he announced, brandishing a sheaf of papers. "Now he'll howl. Just cost a thousand. Got seven thousand of his ten left."

She sat up suddenly. "Didn't you say they were going to start a paper pulp mill?" she demanded.

"Sure. What else is there around here?"

She clapped her hands rapturously. "Then they'll have to have wood."

Archie stared.

"Don't you see? Don't you see?" she asked. "Buy options on the wood!"

He blinked.

"Oh Archie, Archie! I knew I could help you. I just knew I could. Now I'm going along when you buy these options. We can have a regular camping party out in the woods."

And so it was arranged. The next afternoon the two ladies and the young man, together with three natives, left the city in canoes. This means of transportation had also been Betty's decision. Up the river they went, two and a half miles above the town. Then the guides laboriously beached the canoes and carried canoes and contents around the break in navigation caused by a waterfall of considerable size and beauty.

"Isn't this just wonderful!" Betty exclaimed, as the smooth flow broke into ripples and then into vapor over the crest of the descent. "I just think—" She paused suddenly and gazed at the water, her eyes wide.

"What?" Archie asked.

"Nothing," she said and turned away.

During the week which followed things were not so easy for Archie. Owners of timber land did not part with options so readily as did owners of Parker City Air Line stock. Although the timber was second growth, exceedingly rank and tangled, the wary ones who owned most of the hill land refused to part with options for a mere song. So by the end of the week Archie found his seven thousand nearing the exhaustion point and his stack of options small indeed.

"This is enough anyhow," he told Betty one evening as they drifted downstream in a canoe, for once rid of the all too efficient chaperon. "I've got all this land I can get without paying a lot of money and I think we'd better go back to town and wait till dad sees where I've got him."

So two days later Archie established himself at his club. His father's agents were slow in tracing down the options, he saw, and by thus returning to the city he would interpose another obstacle in their path. His father must come to him in person and plead for the stock. He must admit that he had been double-crossed handsomely by a son whose power he had despised. Archie decided this early in his stay at the club.

But strangely no agent appeared. The days became a week. The week lengthened into two, three and then a month, and still no word came from the Rollins Engineering Company. Archie became uneasy. His air of vast dignity grew somewhat brittle and likely to crack at moments when he least wished it. Could it be that he had been mistaken about the Parker City project? No. He had heard the conversation, and men did not come to his father with vain prospects.

Another week. His bank account dwindled to a slim two-figure total. This became but a single-figure total, and by

the time another week had dragged past he avoided the club bulletin board lest he might see his name posted there with other delinquents.

And then a bright idea smote him. The men who had been sent by his father to acquire the railroad stock had learned that a Rollins had purchased the options. But they had never guessed that he, Archie Rollins, the erstwhile despised loafer, was the man. He had left no address at Parker City and no word as to his destination. How could they know that it had been he? He had signed his name simply A. K. Rollins.

It delighted him. He would go to his father, beard him in his den and tell him just how he had been boxed by his forhanded, fore-thinking son. The idea arrived during an evening. He could scarcely sleep that night in anticipation of the morrow's interview. A hundred times he rehearsed the scene and long before other occupants of the club were about the next morning he had spent hours in careful selection of his costume.

He entered the outer offices of the Rollins Engineering Company shortly after nine. "Is Mr. Rollins in?" His voice was dry and colorless and he looked through Sam, the office boy, with a cold, glittering eye.

"Just a minute, sir. Won't you sit down, sir?"

Archie unbent his perpendicular six feet and rested on the settee while Sam scurried across the office. He was back in an instant. "Yes, sir," he reported obsequiously.

The elder Rollins was as usual bending absorbedly over his desk—the pose an ancient camouflage to compel his visitor to speak the first word. Archie waited. The master clock on the wall ticked loudly. A minute passed. His father rattled papers. Another minute passed. Then, surprised at the silence the elder Rollins turned. "Well! Got a job?" His voice was challenging, even a bit triumphant.

"I beg pardon."

Rollins frowned. "I said, did you get a job?"

Archie raised his eyebrows slightly. "A job?"

Rollins glared. "Look here," he snapped, shaking a peremptory finger at the tall young man. "You know what I told you when you left here!"

Archie nodded. "But you asked me if I had a job."

"That's what I want to know."

Archie pondered thoughtfully for a moment. "May I ask you a question?" he queried. "How are you getting along with your Parker City proposition?"

Rollins was on his guard instantly. "What do you know about anything we've got on at Parker City?"

Archie shrugged, exactly as he had practiced the night before. "I heard some little mention of it," he returned, lighting a cigarette.

The elder Rollins was frankly puzzled. "What are you driving at now?" he growled.

Archie blew a smoke ring. "I was simply wondering how you were getting along," he returned, in a bored tone.

Rollins eyed him a moment nonplussed. "Lord!" he snapped, "I thought getting out for yourself would help you. Here you come back with that ten thousand gone and ask me a lot of crazy questions. What have you been doing?"

A polite buzz of the desk telephone interrupted him. "Yes," he snapped into the transmitter. "Put him on the wire. "Peabody?" he demanded. "What the devil have you been doing? Why don't you send in that option?"

Archie listened interestedly. Here might be another opportunity.

"What?" his father was saying. "Been sold? They're trying to bluff you. Atkinson told me it was clear as a bell, just waiting for the first man to come along and grab it."

Rollin's tone was sneering. "What? I said buy that option. We want it. Look here," he thundered, beating the desk with his free hand. "I haven't any time to fool. I'll be up there on the first train I can get and do it myself." He banged the receiver on the hook and swung on his son. "Now what in blazes do you want? Say it quick. I'm in a hurry."

Archie sighed in boredom and exhaled

another cloud of smoke. "Oh, don't let me detain you," he said sweetly. "I was simply curious to know how you and Mr. Atkinson were getting along with your pulp mill at Parker City."

Rollins snorted. "Who in hell said anything about a pulp mill at Parker City?" he demanded. "We're after a water power proposition."

A HALF hour later Archie sat limply on a settee in the Barrington drawing room while Betty hovered about him solicitiously. "But what's the matter?" she asked for the third time, slipping down beside him.

Archie wet his dry lips with the tip of his tongue, and turned his glassy eyes to meet hers. "I—I guess the game's up," he whispered huskily. "They're—they're not going to build a pulp mill. I thought they were because it was that way in the story. They're going to build a water power plant."

A maid entered hesitatingly. "Gentleman to see you, miss," she announced, holding out a card tray. Betty stared wide-eyed from Archie to the card.

"Show him in," she ordered.

The next minute the short figure of Rollins senior appeared in the doorway, bowed to the girl and cast a quick, inquiring glance at his son. "I suppose you think I'm crazy, Miss Barrington," he began awkwardly, "but I just stopped in on my way home to ask you something. It's this way. Our company's after a proposition out at Parker City. Seems somebody here bought an option on some land we want. A woman! Just gave her address as city, and we can't locate her. Name's Elizabeth Barrington. I wondered if she's a relative of yours and if you know where she lives."

Betty returned Rollin's glance with a dazzling smile. "I think I do. I bought that option." Her smile faded into a firm, cold stare. "But if you want to buy it you'll have to talk to my agent." She waved a slim, shapely hand toward Archie.

Rollins eyed the two in bewilderment. "What?" he gasped. "You?"

Archie assumed his business role with a sudden wild leap as Betty's cue permeated his dazed intelligence. He faced his father with a bored sigh. "That water power matter?" he queried languidly. "Why, yes. I told her it ought to be a pretty good little sideline. You see I'm planning a development of that valley, bought the railroad and most of the town and timber land. Sort of thought this might come in handy some time. Did you want it?"

FIFTEEN minutes later Betty raised her head from his shoulder. "And how much did he say he'd pay you?" she asked softly.

"Ten thousand a year to start with," Archie replied tightening his arm.

She sighed luxuriously. "And how much ought you to get from those things up in the valley?"

Archie pondered. "Sixty or eighty when they're developed," he decided.

She snuggled closer. "Oh, Archie!" she whispered ecstatically. "I'm so glad. I knew I could help you some way, but I never dreamed that was what they wanted. I just had to do something because you know the girl in the story did. I simply love options, don't you?"

INSIDE THE MUFF

By JOSEPH T. KESCEL

Grayland can make bricks without straw, or steel without tungsten, or love without particular regard for conventional methods. How his steel formula, carelessly left on a spindle, brings a certain matter to a climax, is related in this tale.

RAYLAND was on the job the instant he slipped into his overalls. The first time he thought of wages was when he joined a long line of men moving toward the cashier's window, for their weekly pay envelopes.

His hat came off with a jerk when he peered through the opening and stammered his name. He hadn't expected to see a girl, but there she was and he couldn't help noticing the twinkle in her eyes.

"Sign here, please!" He noted that her voice was clear and girlish, before writing his name on a line at the bottom of the payroll indicated by a pink forefinger.

"Please count your money before leaving the office," she said, as he turned away.

He did, but somehow his thoughts dwelt entirely on wavy hair, blue eyes and the pretty face that had dimpled at his embarrassment. Hadn't her lips curved in just a trace of a smile? Of course they had, and he was now more pleased than ever that he had come to Pittsburg. He liked the town and also liked his job in the steel plant, although he had been obliged to start at the first rung, and now he knew that he was going to like the girl at the pay-window.

The long line gradually grew shorter as the men walked away with their envelopes, until but one person remained, and that was Grayland, making his second trip around. "Say," he said, again turning in at the window, and looking squarely into the questioning blue eyes, "will you go to the theatre with me?"

She would not, and told him so while closing the window in his face.

Grayland had the same question on his lips, when on the next Saturday he swung around and faced the cashier's window. Then he hadn't, for instead of pink cheeks he beheld a pair of bearded ones, and clerical eyes that peered at him over half-moon glasses, while their owner grunted, "Name?"

How was Grayland to know the girl took the cashier's place at intervals? He guessed it now and glanced further back into the office. There she was, arranging a pile of time cards on a big flat-topped desk, and the repressed question again popped to his lips. "Say," he called, "will you go to the theatre with me?"

She didn't look up and he repeated the words, his deep voice booming across the room and even through an open door behind her. Now she raised her head and glanced at the grimy face, peering over the cashier's shoulder, then went on deliberately with her work.

The half-moon glasses raised and lowered as the cashier wrinkled his nose and smiled from one to the other. The smile broadened into a grin, when he looked over the girl's bowed head and saw a bulky blond man, well under thirty, who stood in the doorway, holding a steaming test tube between his thumb and forefinger.

Grayland saw the man, too, but how was he to know that this florid, shifting-eyed chemist, whose name he had learned was Vincent Oarnswell, would ever mean anything in particular to him? "All right," he said to himself, "maybe she'll go when we're better acquainted," and he made for the door, Oarnswell's eyes boring into his broad back.

Tim Halloran, the roustabout boss, declared he knew a good man when he saw one. Already he had taken a shine to the

stocky, long-armed youngster called Grayland, who early one Monday morning had asked for a job. "That lad'll not be in my gang long," he prophesied, and he was not thinking altogether of the boy's brawny frame. It was more the jovial, tanned face, with its big, good-natured mouth, square chin, and smiling brown eyes. Although but twenty-one, tiny lines of determination and dogged persistence already showed at the corners of that big mouth.

"He'll get what he's after and harm no one while getting it," was Halloran's summary.

Someone beside the roustabout boss knew when Grayland moved up a rung. That someone was Dorothy Bascomb, and for reasons entirely her own, she looked up the last week's payroll. Blue eyes watched a pencil-point run down a long column of names until it stopped at the heavy scrawl, "Fred L. Grayland," which she knew had been made with big grimy fingers as strong and determined as his sweat-streaked face.

"Huh, the very idea of him asking me to go to the theatre!" and she slipped the payroll back into its drawer. As the weeks went by, the roustabout boss watched Grayland jump from gang to gang, while in the office Dorothy Bascomb noted the ever increasing amount of his pay envelope, and smiled. Twice she met him on the street and both times he repeated his invitation.

Christmas morning she had a surprise. "Dis is for you," and a grinning messenger boy thrust a big white box, nearly as large as himself, into her arms.

"For me?" She was saucer-eyed. "You are sure?"

"Yep!" he called back over his shoulder, pattering down the steps to the street.

Mother Bascomb stood at her elbow when she lifted the cover, and both mother and daughter gasped in delight, as the contents were revealed. Roses, carnations, more roses, more carnations, were taken out before a card was discovered, bearing in a big heavy scrawl the two words, "Merry Christmas!"

"They must be from Vincent," murmured Mother Bascomb. "He shouldn't be so extravagant."

But her daughter was saying to herself, "The big dear, the big dear," and her mind was centered on a heavily scrawled signature she had seen on the payroll each week for some time past.

Someone besides the roustabout boss now knew that Grayland was always on the job, and this someone was no less a person than Richard Cleave, superintendent of plant Number Four.

"Say," said Grayland, coming upon the superintendent early one morning as he was thoughtfully staring upward at a huge pile of steel ingots, "I've got an idea that might be useful to you!"

"Have, hey?" Dicky Cleave would always listen to anyone who he thought had something so say. He was a big man, big all over, with a full, round face and friendly black eyes that smiled with his lips at anything which pleased him. At first he was only moderately interested in what Grayland was saying, for his mind was almost wholly centered on that mass of unworked steel. Then he began to ask questions and finally wound up by carefully watching a grimy forefinger darting to and fro over a freshly made blueprint.

"Well, I'll be trimmed. Darned if that wrinkle won't work. This stuff's been piling up and piling up, with no chance to get out from under. Contract stuff, too, that's badly needed. There'll be something good in this for you, Grayland. What's the idea worth? I'll pass it along if you say so."

"You think it'll hurry the stuff out?"

"Dead certain; more than anything I know of right now!"

"Then take 'er and remember me when a better job's in sight." Grayland shoved the blueprint into Cleave's hand and walked away.

When Dicky Cleave rolled back the top of his desk, which stood close beside the laboratory door, and within arm's reach of Dorothy Bascomb's, he was still smiling.

"Say, Dot!" He was so tickled that he had to talk to some one, and there was the girl right at his elbow. "We stand a mighty good chance of cleaning up things at Number Four. Young fellow by the name of—name of—" He searched the blueprint for a name, but finding none went on—

"youngster helped us out. Strapping big fellow with curly black hair and a 'get-there' face. It's funny I've forgotten his name. It's—it's—" He tipped back his swivel-chair and twirled his thumbs, his forehead furrowed in study.

"Grayland," she supplied.

"That's it, Grayland, Jack Grayland," and Cleave's chair swung to an upright position.

"Fred," she corrected him, with a smile.

"Huh! So 'tis!" He paused a moment, then added, "Darned if I see how you keep track of 'em: it's more than I could do. But—well, anyway he's the one that's given us a lift."

A shadow that had been outlined on the frosted glass of the laboratory door while Cleave was talking changed into Vincent Oarnswell, as the knob turned and the chemist stood in the doorway. He beamed down at the girl and then turned to the superintendent. "Will you come into the laboratory before going back to the plant?" he asked, at the same time glancing at the spread-out blueprint.

"Sure, right away!" Cleave closed his desk and turned the lock.

A half hour later Dorothy Bascomb saw him leave the building without returning to the office. Shortly after one o'clock he came in and went at once to his desk. "That's strange," she heard him say, and her ear caught the crinkle of papers. Then somehow she felt his eyes boring into her neck.

"Dot!" She swung around at his commanding tone. "Has anyone been at my desk?"

She sensed that something had gone wrong and answered quickly, "No, unless it was after I went to lunch."

"You're positive that no one unlocked my desk, either before you went to lunch or since your return?"

"Yes, sir!"

Cleave's face shadowed. "Who was in the office when you went out?"

"No one. I was the last to leave and the first to come back."

"Well"—he forced a smile—"then it must have been done while you were away."

"Done? Done what? Mr. Cleave!"

"Somebody's taken the blueprint." He lowered his voice almost to a whisper, as he noted her agitation and then went on more kindly, "Don't think for a second that I suspect you, Dot!"

"Thank you."

"That's all right, Dot! That's all right, but keep this to yourself. There's no harm done, for Grayland can easily make another; but it confirms a suspicion that's been in my mind for quite a while, that we've got someone on the payroll who's not working altogether in the interest of the company."

Scarcely had Cleave left the office, when the laboratory door again swung open. Vincent Oarnswell entered and seated himself on a corner of the girl's desk. He was very affable and talked to her in his low, well-modulated voice, but when he asked to be excused from a dinner engagement at her home that evening, his foot, which had been swinging to and fro beneath the desk corner, came to a dead stop while he awaited her answer.

"Mother will be disappointed," she said, and felt the words were true, for Mother Bascomb had her own ideas concerning this young chemist whom she sometime hoped to call "son-in-law."

A flurry of fine snow stung Dorothy's cheeks and the air was bitter cold as she left the office that evening and hurried toward the nearest street corner to wait for a car. Five minutes dragged to ten, ten to twenty. A half hour slipped by and she was chilled through and through. Still no car came jolting down the track.

To protect her benumbed fingers she tucked them into her ample coat sleeves and with half-frozen toes beat a tattoo upon the snow-covered sidewalk. Twice she decided to walk home, but each time changed her mind after going a few steps from the well-lighted corner, recalling the dark thoroughfares through which she would have to pass.

Her heart quickened as she watched a bright light disentangle itself from the blurred glare a dozen blocks away and come bowling down the track toward her. When it was a block away she withdrew her hands from the coat sleeves.

"Oh dear! Oh dear!" burst from her

trembling lips, as a coin slipped from her hand to the sidewalk. Quickly stooping over she tried to pick it up, but her stiffened fingers only fumbled it from side to side in the snow.

To her the headlight of the rapidly approaching car was a friendly, big yellow eye, that would soon pass, and she would be obliged to wait on in the cold for the next, whose coming, because of the storm, was very uncertain. "Oh dear, oh dear," she repeated and then became aware of a brawny figure which emerged from the shadows and stepped to her side.

"Lost something? Maybe I can help you find it?" She knew the voice though she had heard it but few times before.

"Yes, my carfare," she wailed, her reply sounding to Grayland like that of a distressed child.

A big hand brushed her small one aside, a long thumb and forefinger scooped up a nickle, with the swiftly moving car now but a few rods distant.

"Want to catch 'er?" he queried.

"Yes! Please!"

"All right!" Now that big hand grabbed her arm and she felt herself being hurried toward the middle of the street in a most undignified manner.

"Hey! Hold up!" he roared, frantically waving the stop signal at the motorman, when he thought the car was going by.

The brakes gripped the fast revolving wheels, and the car came to a grinding, jolting stop a few feet beyond the opposite corner. Somehow Dorothy Bascomb liked the feeling of that strong hand which half guided, half carried her so unceremoniously down the tracks. She was smiling her thanks when he lifted her to the platform and dropped the nickle in her hand.

"Say, will yuh go—" He bit off the balance of the sentence then caught her, "Oh-thank-you-so-much," before the car clanged ahead. "I'm glad I didn't say it," he reflected. "Maybe she'd have thought I was trying to take advantage of circumstances."

Mother Bascomb pricked up her ears when two hours later she heard the sound of footsteps on the front porch. "That must be Vincent. He's probably finished the work earlier than he expected and has come to spend the evening with us," she said, going toward the door. But it wasn't, for instead of the chemist, the same grinning messenger boy who had delivered the flowers on Christmas morning, shoved a neatly-wrapped package into her outstretched hands. "For Miss Bascomb," he said, and then hustled away.

Mother Bascomb was dimpling when her daughter removed the wrapper and a cardboard box was revealed. "I suppose it's from Vincent." She smiled, looked pointedly at her daughter and went on, "Dot, I don't think you appreciate what a fine young man he really is."

The cover was lifted, likewise several sheets of soft white tissue paper, then the girl gave a delighted little squeal, "Oh mother, it's a muff!"

She slipped her hands into the daintily lined opening and pressed the soft black fur against her cheek. "Oh, but isn't it a beauty? And it's come on my birthday, too!"

Imaginative Mother Bascomb's round face dimpled more deeply as she watched Dorothy's dancing eyes, and then repeated, "I don't think you appreciate what a fine young man he really is." Beyond a doubt she believed the package had come from Oarnswell, even though no card could be found and the plain white box and wrapper disclosed not so much as a single mark.

"Perhaps it's not for me, after all?" The dancing lights left the girl's eyes as she spoke and she held the muff at arm's length, sadly surveying the rich black fur.

"Why, of course, my dear, it's for you!" Imaginative Mother Bascomb immediately became practical Mother Bascomb, as she again said, "Why, of course it's for you!"

"But there's nothing to show that it is." Her daughter's face reddened and she added, "I can't keep it."

But she did keep it and while her mother thought of a tall blonde, her own mind pictured a young giant who but a short time before had so unceremoniously hurried her onto the street car.

Dicky Cleave had something good on his mind, when late the following afternoon he bustled into the office.

"Say Dot," he chuckled, paying no attention to the open laboratory door. "I'm so tickled again, I've just got to talk to someone. Yesterday, after that blueprint disappeared, I looked up this young Grayland for another copy. Ten minutes later he had me in a quiet corner, talking steel like an old timer. At first I just smiled and acted sort of fatherly; then all of a sudden I didn't, for that lad was talking real wisdom.

"Three o'clock came with him reeling off the regular terms, like a fireman runs out a hose, and me listening with ears pricked up, same as a donkey's. Five o'clock found us in the experimental plant getting ready to do something.

"Before six he was hustling toward his room, a little two by four hole-in-the-wall, half sleeping quarters, half laboratory, over near the South yards. The instant he got back, around eight or nine, this formula was poked into my hand." Cleave speared a soiled sheet of paper on a spindle at the far end of his desk, near the laboratory door, then went on. "After that he kept the entire experimental crew, also himself and me, tearing around like spotlight devils all night and day, up to a few minutes ago."

"Why, Mr. Cleave!"

"Yep, that's what he did and when the performance was over, he showed us some steel that's goin' to revolutionize one part of the industry. Somehow, he says it was an accident, he tumbled onto a mix that just about eliminates the use of tungsten, and still gives the same class of material. Tungsten, Dot, is mighty expensive and darned hard to get, as well as being very important in the manufacture of steel. What wouldn't some of the other concerns give for that formula?" The superintendent chuckled. "A big wad! I tell you, Dot, that kid's made his stake, for he had business ability enough to cinch things before we started the experiment!"

He checked further speech with an abruptness that sent his big white teeth clicking together, as the office door swung open and a bright-faced boy hustled into the room, breaking out, "You're wanted at the experimental plant right away."

Cleave was thinking of no one in particular when he walked through the door, but Dorothy Bascomb was. In her mind she pictured Grayland's jovial face, with its big, good-natured mouth, square chin, smiling brown eyes, beneath their heavy black eyebrows, and the hair of the same color, that curled at the ends. "Fred sent for Mr. Cleave," she thought, then glanced at the clock, surprised to find the hour past her regular time for leaving.

Now Dorothy Bascomb was a girl, perhaps somewhat better looking than the average; but yet she felt that her hair must be patted into place and the shine removed from her dainty little nose. Her back was to the laboratory door when she made the first dab with a powder puff while looking into a small mirror, taken from a vanity bag lying in her lap.

Two blue eyes suddenly became set and a pair of curved lips straightened into knife-edge lines, as the mirror revealed something besides her fast coloring cheeks. A long, slender hand was stealing around the side of the open laboratory door and moving slowly toward the formula, still on the spindle. She shifted the mirror a trifle, and made out a coatless arm that she knew was Vincent Oarnswell's.

All in a flash she thought of the missing blueprint. Oarnswell must have stolen it and was trying to secure the formula in the same way. Dicky Cleave's words, "We've got someone on the payroll who's not working altogether in the interest of the company," came back to her and she moved her chair.

The arm was jerked out of sight, then she arose. Humming softly to herself she took her muff from a rack on the wall and with well-feigned carelessness dropped it over the spindle, making sure the formula was inside. A moment later she was pinning on her hat, her mind centered entirely on getting the paper to the experimental plant.

Oarnswell's florid face and bulky frame filled the doorway, and he hastened to help her on with her coat. Then he stepped close to the desk and with assumed admiration smilingly surveyed the muff. "Ah ha, Dot! Something new?" and he beamed

from one to the other, before slipping his hand inside the silk-lined opening. "Ah ha!" he repeated, his face wrinkling in a knowing smirk, with Dorothy Bascomb watching his hand slide further from sight, wondering all the time if he would try to steal the formula while she looked on. Somehow she at once guessed his plan. He would, and later on, should he be questioned, would say, "Why it must have been in the muff and Dot lost it on the street." His word would be as good as hers, and —well, what difference did it make so long as he had what he wanted. Of course he had no thought that she suspected anything, and that evened matters a little.

Her smile matched his as she glanced at the clock, turned to him, and broke out, "My! its getting late. I must be going!"

She caught the crinkle of paper before Oarnswell withdrew his hand and stepped back a pace, while her own, slowly thrust into the silk-lined opening, found only the empty spindle. A few seconds before she had been anxious to be off. Now, she was just as anxious to stay—stay until some one came in, no matter who.

Throwing her weight on one foot she pressed the muff against her cheek and rattled on with small talk, all the time archly looking up at the satisfied face before her. She had very little to say, but that little was accompanied by rippling laughter, a tilt to her chin or toss of her pretty head. When one foot became tired she shifted her weight and went on talking.

Ten minutes ran into fifteen, fifteen into twenty, with Oarnswell becoming more and more fidgety. Then he thought he must be going and said so while taking a step toward the laboratory door.

Dorothy Bascomb thought differently, but she didn't say so. Instead, she managed to place herself directly in his path, dimpling even more coquettishly than before.

"Good night, Dot! See you to-morrow!" His hint to stand aside went unheeded. Still he had no idea that she even thought of the paper now thrust deep in his trouser's pocket. "I've just got to go!" He attempted to brush by into the laboratory.

"Just a moment, Mr. Oarnswell!" Once more she blocked his way, looked up sweetly, then went on, "Haven't you forgotten something?"

"Why no, Dot! No!"

"Haven't you forgotten to replace the paper you took from the spindle?" It was out and she had a hard time to keep smiling.

"Paper? What paper?" he stammered.

"The one in your pocket!" Her smile suddenly vanished as a savage gleam flamed in Oarnswell's eyes.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, throwing out his hand. But before the fingers closed around Dorothy's arm she flew at him and screamed. Screamed loud and long, each piercing note floating across the office yard to a barrack like building, whose furnace lights shone through an open doorway.

"Shut up, you little fool!" Oarnswell attempted to force his hand over the girl's mouth. She twisted her head sideways and let her voice out to its fullest, hoping that some one would shortly come, then fastened her teeth in his hand as he tried a second time to stifle her cries.

An oath broke from Oarnswell's lips as he attempted to free his hand. A second was throttled as a set of powerful fingers closed about his throat. Then he was swung sharply around to stare wide-eyed into Grayland's determined face.

Dorothy Bascomb's bosom heaved as she jumped back and broke out, "Oh Fred, he tried to steal your formula!"

"Did, huh?" Grayland looked from one to the other. "I was just coming after it. Where is it?"

"In his pocket!"

"'Tis, hey? Then we'll make him dig up," and Grayland held out his hand.

Oarnswell dropped a wrinkled piece of paper into the palm, while his gray eyes shifted uneasily. They were still shifting as Grayland propelled him bodily through the door into the night, then turned back into the office, smiled at the muff he had seen once before and in the next breath blurted, "Say, will you marry me?"

She would not and told him so in a tremulous "No!" That is what she said, but she hoped he would ask her a second time. And he did.

KELLEN AND MISS VAN WYCK

By J. W. SCOTT

Kellen has the right of way so long only as he sticks to his train. Miss Van Wyck isn't mentioned in the train orders, and there is no block signal to warn him about the signpost.

THE Southern Pacific Railroad and Rogue River come down the winding gorges of southern Oregon running abreast like wolves on a blood trail by paths that shuffle in and out and cross and recross as they drive to the south, ever to the south; and wherever the road sweeps over the river on a bridge the water tugs at the piers to bring it down; and year by year the sweating engines of many thundering trains hoot derision at the turbulent son of the mountains raging with foam on his lips.

Kellen's division was in this part of the world. He was a conductor, and as he punched tickets from Mokuhlteno to Skybelt and from Skagland to Kitswitch he forgot about how the river ran and clutched at the feet of his firewagon, and inwardly cursed the monotony of things and the aridness of life, and prayed a change. He was the kind of man who takes too much interest in too many women. There is always trouble in that, but there is not always a tragedy in the bottom of the bag. His wife had blue eyes, and while she was growing a little bit faded, there was a pathetic, babyish sweetness in her face that would have nailed some men to the foot of her throne throughout the day and the night of all time. But Kellen wanted fire, evidently. The pathos and the babyishness and the sweetness probably wearied him.

When Miss Van Wyck tripped on the coach step and gave him a smile for aid received, out of black eyes burning in a pale face a trifle strained and worn looking, there is no question but what the watcher of men's lives recorded the arrival of a woman of interest to him. Miss Van Wyck had red hair of the rich shadow and gold kind, and though the milky cheeks were a bit gaunt and the chin prominent, there was a flaring sparkle in the great black eyes, and majesty in the well-held shoulders and long limbs when she walked.

Kellen owed Miss Van Wyck to the gods of the public school—they led her into the region that knew him. She taught school at Nesqualmie, and when she took up the birch rod there she elevated the window blind and noted down Kellen's train as a means of escape, as it whirred along the river bank by the black water and ripped up the valley.

When she donned the robe of office she did not say, "Here are many little ones to me given that I may mold them into fine vessels as the potter shapes the clay; and that is enough." No. She said, "This place is lonely. I see no young men here. What a vile wilderness."

Nesqualmie was beautiful in the summer. But that was not enough. She was not filled with delight because Shasta, the great mountain, swam ever in the blue air, and little white snow devils chased themselves up and down its frozen sides. The big yellow water lilies, rocked on the pools in hollow places, were disregarded by her, and the martial song of the Rogue, as it swirled by the door, drooling and sputtering where black, needle-pointed rocks stood up, and leering at the railroad, was as little to her as the swish of the wind in the cedars. She did not know that the ruck of the mountain ranges green-clad and marching in solid ranks to his foot made obeisance and did homage to old Shasta as their king, nor that the warm mountain side upon which Nesqualmie

nestled threw its fir and cedar woods around the village as a mother wraps her arms about a child; nor did it count with her that the air was sweet as nectar, the sky blue as sapphire, and the sunlight streaming through the forest on the heights like shimmering golden hair. Not at all.

She knew that she had to ride alone in the summer afternoons, and that the birds and the squirrels chattered horribly; and that the lonliness struck upon her nerves and made her start at shadows. Wherefore she was very much dissatisfied.

Then, in the winter, a gray mist of rain hangs over the Nesqualmie hills, and the woods drip with water, and the Rogue boils and dances, and whirls the rotten logs along to the sea. That was a viler time for Miss Van Wyck than the summer. It was muggier and more cheerless, and full of the hideous, disheartening spectres of bad day dreams.

But she fell upon the device of going up the road to Potlace, which was almost a town, and possessed a few joys in the way of some women friends and a fresh face once a year perhaps. These flights were made Friday evenings after the children went home for the week, and she always returned Sunday night, so she would be ready for school on Monday morning.

After it had become Kellen's unrighteous custom to stop at her seat, and look into her face, and grin and say something pretty in a voice too low to be caught by the other passengers, the flights got to be regular. And thus there grew up something between them. If you had observed her closely, you would have seen that she watched for him after she took her seat, looking expectantly forward whenever the coach door opened, and that a faint blush put warmth in her white cheeks, and a look sprang into her eyes when he came down the aisle.

Once when she was riding beside the railroad, in the hills, a train broke suddenly around a curve and frightened the colt she rode—a small, compact, sorrel devil, made up of nerves and beautified by white stockings and a snow star on his forehead. The colt bolted sidewise across a brook at the roadside into the woods like a yellow flash; and she instantly turned him round and brought him back to the road, and kept him facing the train till it passed, sitting like a graven image while he danced, a sharp glint in her eyes and a high color in her cheeks. Kellen witnessed the performance, and he afterwards told her about it with enthusiasm, dwelling upon his admiration with emphasis.

It may be he forgot about his wife in talking about this and kindred subjects. It does not matter. He did forget about her, and about the vows pledged at the church when she was not so faded; and he made a plan to help Miss Van Wyck kick the dust of Nesqualmie from her shoes forever.

They planned to go away from Oregon secretly; and he quietly wound up his few business affairs and drew all the money he had in bank. Their plan was to meet in the evening a few miles above Nesqualmie, and from there ride away on horse-back together. Miss Van Wyck was to station herself in the woods by the railroad at a grade-foot where his train slackened speed, and he was to drop off the train covertly when it should pass, take the horse she should bring for him, and ride with her thirty miles through the night and the woods to the Oregon coast. Then they were to make Seattle by steamer and train, and go East. Once East they should plan further. For one thing, Miss Van Wyck would thereafter have an escort when she went riding, and she would not have to endure the depressing rain clouds hanging over the Nesqualmie hills. When Mrs. Kellen should see fit to give Kellen a divorce, they would be married. Kellen gave his wife no hints, but left the blow to fall upon her without warning. He wanted to avoid hindrances, and was therefore very cautious.

They selected Friday evening for their departure, notwithstanding the evil devil that presides over that day, because Miss Van Wyck would not be inquired for till Monday morning, when the children should return to school, and that would give them a big start. She told the horse owner of the village from whom she hired the horses

that she was going riding down the river to Ballerton with a friend who would call for her at the house where she dwelt—that she had time to make the proper arrangements, while he had not—and accordingly the horses were left at her door.

The owls were hooting in the shadow when she reached the rendezvous at the grade-foot, and the river was growling among the willows. Her nerves were on razor edge when Kellen's train went by, and back among the trees, she jerked her restless horse's bobbing head with aimless and unreasoning viciousness.

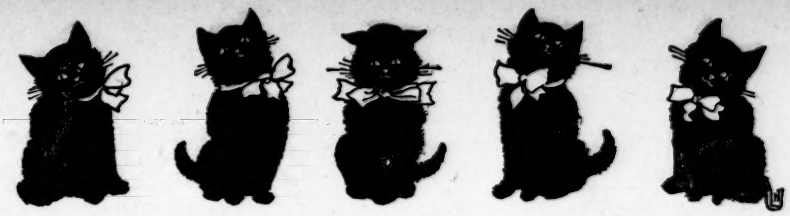
But Kellen did not get off as the train skurried along puffing and flashing its lights. Miss Van Wyck sat waiting on her horse a long while, staring after the train and biting her lips, while her heart variously fluttered and sank and stood still. The gloom of the woods increased and was imparted to her soul. She waited stoically for an hour, hopelessly and wonderingly, and then turned toward Nesqualmie.

A quarter of a mile above the trysting spot the Rogue runs between narrow shores like a mad river, and a railroad bridge crosses it there. As the train drew near the bridge, Kellen was seen to go out on the platform and look ahead, according to a custom of his. Later the forward brakeman missed him, and he was found no more upon the train.

Down the river a mile from where he should have dropped off to join Miss Van Wyck with an eager smile on his face, the river spreads out suddenly over a flat in shallows, and here there was a ford leading back to Nesqualmie. Miss Van Wyck rode through the fir trees under the moonlight to this spot, and there she saw something in the river close to the bank, half in and half out of the willow shadows. It was going round and round slowly in an eddy, and its white face was turned up to the moon. No doubt it looked ghastly, for when she galloped into Nesqualmie half an hour later, she was raving and wringing her hands in a state of hysteria. Her nerves had been seriously shocked, and as she swayed and shook in the saddle it was gathered out of her incoherent moanings and self-reproaches that something was wrong at the ford.

Some men went out there, and there they recovered Kellen's body from the river; and they picked up the horse that had been led for him, browsing along the road. Afterward, it was found that a signboard on a post that stood close to the railroad track at the bridge where he disappeared had been twisted half around. It was thought that he leaned too far out and struck that, which was criminally close to the track; and it is probable that at the time when Miss Van Wyck was waiting for him in the grisly timber with parted lips and heaving breast, he was washing heedlessly by, his ears deaf and his eyes blind, in the current of the Rogue.

The horse owner and the nurse who attended Miss Van Wyck through the fever that followed the hysteria, and listened to her delirious babble, furnished information that patched out her story. Kellen was buried at Mokuhlteno, where his wife lived, and no one whispered anything to his wife about Miss Van Wyck; so the fading little woman, with the pathos-charged eyes of blue, grieved over him sincerely. The funeral took place while Miss Van Wyck was delirious, and Kellen was some time in his grave when she recovered. This saved her pain, because she could not have gone to the funeral had she been well, being unknown to his wife, and having no recognized ground of acquaintance with him that would have justified it. As soon as she was well she resigned her school and hurried away from Nesqualmie. She now teaches school in the south of California in a bare, flat region where the sun shines all the time. She cannot endure rain, nor clouds, nor mountains, nor woods —and running water in the moonlight turns her sick and shuddering.



The Black Cat Club

IT IS nearly twenty years now since the BLACK CAT purchased a story from Jack London at a time when, despairing of success, he was about to go back to coal-heaving. Many are familiar with this incident which was of so much importance to the literary world; and it is a well known fact among writers that the BLACK CAT has, during every year since that time, held to its policy of encouraging young writers. Many other writers, whose names are familiar to all magazine readers, started their careers by writing stories for the BLACK CAT. Among them are Alice Hegan Rice, Rupert Hughes, Harry Stilwell Edwards, Will N. Harben, Geraldine Bonner, Sewell Ford, Holman F. Day, Cleveland Moffett, Juliet Wilbur Thompkins, Ellis Parker Butler and, to mention some of the more recent arrivals among the top-notchers, James Francis Dwyer, Ida M. Evans, Hapsburg Liebe, William Hamilton Osborne, and William J. Neidig.

The editors of the **BLACK CAT are constantly** receiving manuscripts that are apparently the first, last and only efforts of writers who look with longing eyes upon authorship as a profession, but haven't the courage to keep eternally at it. It never occurs to many of them that in the writing game, as in any other profession, it is necessary to serve an apprenticeship. They are a long time in finding out the first rule—that only by steeping themselves in technique can they master the art of short-story writing. Nothing is of more importance to the beginner. Once mastered, it can be forgotten, or at least become a part of the writer's equipment which he uses unconsciously in every piece of imaginative writing.

There is no better way to learn to write than by analyzing the work of other writers. Thus, it was to help the aspiring writer to a quicker understanding of short-story principles that the BLACK CAT CLUB was started a little more than two years ago. The idea of the Club is very simple. Briefly, it offers the writer an opportunity to master technique by study and criticism of BLACK CAT stories.

Heretofore, the Club has conducted monthly contests. Up to last October, when the contests were discontinued, prizes were awarded each month for the best criticisms, and a composite review was published in each number. These prize contests, as they were conducted, entailed a great deal of labor which it will be possible to eliminate under the present plan. All readers who are interested in short-story criticism, whether they aspire to authorship or not, may become members if they subscribe to the conditions imposed by the Club. First, to simplify matters, members are not required, as formerly, to criticise every story in a single number of the magazine. They may select any story that appeals to them, or more than one if they so desire. Each criticism should be as nearly as possible in the form of a finished essay. It may be breezy and whimsical, or a severely plain exposition; but it should be more than a mere synopsis, and it must not exceed five hundred words. Criticisms should be mailed to the BLACK CAT not later than the tenth of the month following the month of issue: i. e., criticisms of this number (February) should be mailed not later than March 10. *The best criticisms will be paid for at the rate of one cent per word* and will be published, with the names of the authors, in the third issue following, which in this case will be the May number.

Readers who are members of the Club are enthusiastic in their praise of its helpfulness. Several have had stories published in the BLACK CAT and other magazines since they became members. Some have had more than one story published in the BLACK CAT, and one of these has also won enough prize money to pay for a Liberty Bond.

Membership is open to all who are willing to subscribe to the magazine. The subscription price is $1.50 per year, and this entitles the member to a handsome Club emblem in addition to the privilege of criticising the stories in each issue. No criticisms will be returned to the writers, and if acknowledgment of the receipt of a criticism is desired postage must be enclosed with the manuscript.

Those who earnestly desire to attain a full measure of success in the world of letters can do no better than to take advantage of this opportunity, which provides fresh inspiration each month and puts a check upon lagging interest and mental lassitude. Enroll to-day and send in the name of one friend who is interested in short-story criticism.

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Edgar Lucien Larkin, Director
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Author of the Matchless Altar of the Soul

First Nautilus Center
160 Claremont Ave., New York
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CHAS. F. HAANEL, St. Louis, Mo.
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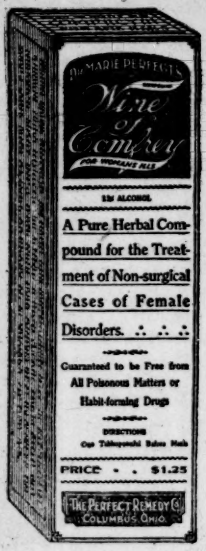
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